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Violet Jermyn



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OR

TENDER AND TRUE

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AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR'



LONDON

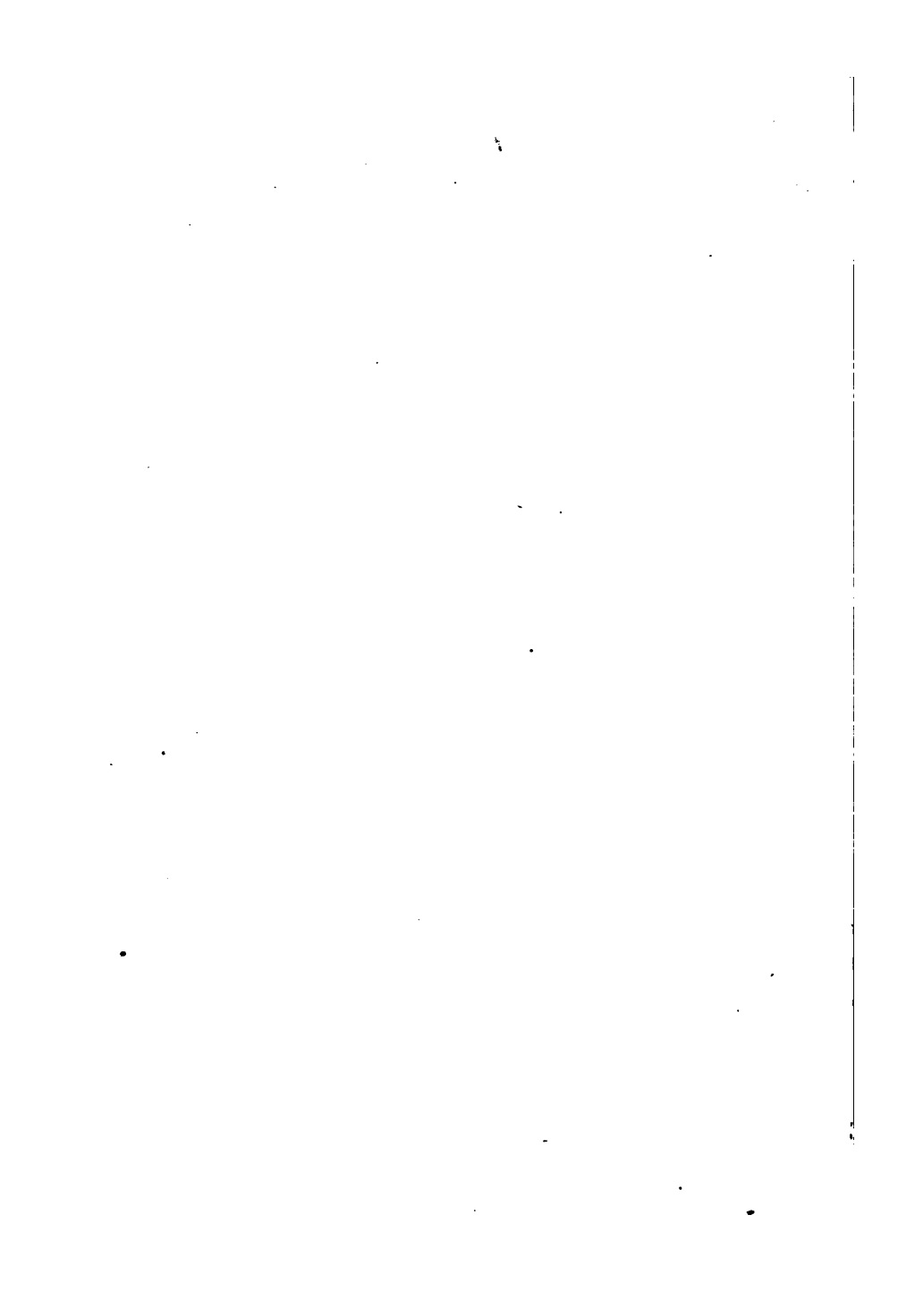
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VIOLET JERMYN;

OR,

TENDER AND TRUE.



CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION.

‘THE salary is small,’ said the young man deprecatingly.

‘Small, sir!’ responded the other sharply; ‘small in one sense, perhaps, yet it will furnish you with some of the luxuries of life, and when one has these, its necessities may be dispensed with;’ and, as if pleased with his aphorism, the speaker added, with a bland smile, ‘we should not forget, Mr. Douglas, that spades turn up wealth, the stimulant to crime.’

‘I am one of those who deem money the root of much good rather than of evil,’ replied Douglas, smiling too.

‘The salary is—as I have said—two hundred per annum, with a residence in my house.’

‘Two hundred—I agree, Sir Jahleel.’

‘I shall add twenty-five more, as you are highly recommended by an eccentric old friend, John Charters, the W.S. of Edinburgh; he calls you a steady and well-conducted young man in his letter of recommendation—ready with your pen, and so forth.’

The listener shivered as if with some disgust at the terms of the letter, and then smiled with covert hauteur.

One speaker was Sir Jahleel Jermyn, Knight, whilom an Alderman of London, a wealthy banker of Gresham Street, and of Barons Hall, a recently acquired property in Sussex; the other was a young man whom he was about to employ as his private secretary, at the salary mentioned, on the urgent recommendation of an old Scottish business friend.

Sir Jahleel was a short, thick-set, and stout elderly man, with a bald and very shining head, tonsured behind from ear to ear with grizzled grey hair; he was closely shaven. The world had prospered with him, and yet his face was said to have two normal expressions. When money was being paid to him, he could smile as benignly as old Mr. Pickwick through his gold-rimmed spectacles; but when paying it out, his aspect became hard, cold, and grim as that of Mr. Ralph Nickleby, and, like the latter, there was, in the wrinkles of his face and cold, restless eye, 'a something which seemed to tell of cunning that would announce itself in spite of him.'

There was no older firm in the City than that of Selby and Jermyn, of Gresham Street, though the name of the first partner alone survived, he and his son having died, the latter in infancy.

His forehead was massive and receding, his ears large and coarse; his lips were straight and thin, but his projecting chin was indicative of firmness and resolution. When not employed with the pen his right hand was generally plunged deep into his trouser-pocket, where it played mechanically with the gold that he loved to hear clinking as it dropped between his fingers, for he doted on his wealth, as if to possess it was the first of Christian virtues. He had no little contempt for all that were in adversity; and this was blended with an emotion of some satisfaction if they were better born or more highly cultured than himself. Sympathy with failure in life he had none, and always curiously associated it with something shameful—if not criminal.

'I give you the additional twenty-five, Mr. Douglas, because,

as old John Charters reminds me in his letter, I have some of the Douglas blood in my veins,' he continued, for some pedigree-monger or almanack-maker had discovered, after the knighthood of Sir Jahleel, a fact of which the ex-Alderman was ignorant, that he, though an Englishman, was descended in the female line from a Scottish family of high rank; and thus he had begun to foster certain ambitious views, embracing nothing less than the probable assumption of a peerage then deemed dormant.

The young man bowed as he spoke, and one of those unfathomable smiles that seemed peculiar to him, spread over his face, as he bit his nether lip. He was tall and handsome, verging on six feet in height, with a dark-complexioned and regular face, almost aquiline in feature, with sparkling hazel eyes. His hair was shorn short; he wore a rich brown beard, also shorn short, and a thick, well-curved moustache. In his forehead was a mark when he knit his eyebrows, not unlike the famous one peculiar to the Lairds of Redgauntlet. In bearing he possessed a suavity of manner combined with a perfect calmness of demeanour that mark a man accustomed to the best society.

Something of this seemed to impress Sir Jahleel Jermyn, and fretted him; thus he said, a little petulantly:

'Are you devoted to a beard and moustache?'

'I have worn them——'

'Always?'

'Always since they grew.'

'Well, I am old-fashioned enough to dislike such things—in business hours at least. Were you bred to any business or profession?'

'To none, sir.'

'Strange! You are about twenty-six, Mr. Charters says.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the young man with some hauteur, as he took up his hat, 'too old for the army now, which, save for that contingency, I would join to-morrow.'

'As a private do you mean?'

'As an officer, Sir Jahleel—my family——' He paused abruptly and haughtily, while the knit in his forehead deepened.

'Oh—ah—indeed,' said Sir Jahleel, polishing his bald head with a large silk handkerchief; 'in the City we don't talk of our families, save in the matter of bills, taxes, and expenses. At six-and-twenty a fellow is almost too old for anything—especially business; habits have been formed, and others are difficult to acquire. By Jove, sir, at ten years of age I was an office boy, whose duty it was to open the yard and counting-room by daylight, and on many a cold winter morning I have trotted along Lower Thames Street, with my jacket buttoned over my worsted comforter, and my half-frozen hands stuffed into my pockets for warmth. Now, what on earth have you been doing with yourself all these years?'

'Excuse me, Sir Jahleel, if I decline to enter on my own private affairs. If the letter of Mr. Charters satisfies you——'

'It does so, perfectly, Mr. Douglas.'

'Sir Jahleel, it has been said that a man with two grievances never pities himself so much as a man with one,' said Douglas, who was so unlike any other applicant for employment that he was a puzzle to the City banker and merchant; 'and it has been also said that "a man with half-a-dozen, treats them all with a good-humoured indifference little removed from positive satisfaction."'

'And how many grievances have you, sir?' asked the other, peering upward through his gold-rimmed spectacles, with a keen glance of inquiry.

'One, sir—a serious one—poverty—else I had not been standing here to-day.'

'Come, we shall understand each other,' said Sir Jahleel, whom the humility of this admission pleased. 'You know French, I presume?'

'Intimately—and German and Latin too. I have had a University education.'

'Latin is not much use in Gresham Street, or elsewhere, I think, but your duties will not lie there.'

'Where then, Sir Jahleel?'

'At my house here, and I hope you will be ready to enter upon them to-morrow,' said the City knight, rising as if to hint that the interview was over, and, bowing, the young man withdrew from the library in which it had been accorded to him. A stately apartment, every portion of which spoke of wealth and luxury—the easy chairs, the carved oak shelves full of splendidly-bound folios, quartos, and octavos, of which Sir Jahleel knew not even the titles, as, like the boards on which they rested, they had been bought by the yard measure, and he knew and cared as little for their contents as for the names of the classical busts that adorned the cornice above them.

'Of whom does this young fellow's face remind me?' pondered Sir Jahleel, as his visitor withdrew. 'Had young Piercy Selby lived he would just have been about the same age—twenty-six years—twenty-six—and John Charters's mysterious protégé is called Douglas—Sholto Douglas,' he added, again referring to the letter of introduction; 'a curious name—very; never met with one who bore it before. But why the devil does he remind me of Piercy? Am I wise in employing one who has been bred to no business—who knows so much and yet so little? Egad—he has little Piercy's very eyes, if ever I saw them!'

He bit his thin netherlip, and a grim, hard expression stole over his face with the thoughts that occurred to him; and of *who* the Piercy was that he referred to the reader may have much to hear in time to come.

Preceded by a servant in livery—a tall 'flunky,' silent and supercilious—meanwhile Douglas passed through the stately entrance hall of Sir Jahleel's Belgravian mansion to its pillared porch, where he found a handsome and well-appointed barouche about to depart to the park, with two ladies in the perfection of carriage costume, for the month was July, and the London

He can secure opera and railway tickets, look after the luggage, and so forth.'

'I am sure some supervision was required,' said Violet; 'even Tapleigh presumes on his twenty years' service in the family to remember when you were——'

'Well, you need not go back to what Tapleigh may remember. We can get rid of him; and Mr.—what is his name?—Douglas can procure another butler, if necessary.'

'Sholto Douglas?—what a curious name!' exclaimed Dolly.

'Taken out of some novel, no doubt,' said Miss Jermyn.

'Not at all,' replied Violet. 'Sholto is common enough with people of his name in Scotland.'

'If of rank, I believe; but then a Douglas might be a drayman or a duke.'

'Don't talk about Scotland, please, or I shall never forget that too awful Sunday we once spent in Edinburgh,' said Dolly a little irrelevantly.

Handsome, attractive, and still young, though the freshness of her first youth was past, Katharine Jermyn was not above a mild flirtation with most men; but, proud by nature, cold and calculating, she would have shrunk from such a condescension with one in the position of a paid dependent, like 'papa's private secretary;' but she could not fail to be favourably impressed in his interest on his appearance in the drawing-room when the dinner gong was sounded, and he was introduced by Sir Jahleel to herself, her two sisters, and their only guests on this occasion, the Reverend Octave Paschal Bede and Vincent Sheldon, who, as Dolly's *fiancé*, was already viewed as one of the family, and of both of whom more anon.

In departing to the dining-room, Miss Jermyn took the arm of the curate, a gentle and timid young man, the poverty of whose living at Baron's Hall, in Sussex, did not prevent him from being hopelessly in love with her; and Violet took the arm of Douglas, whose acquaintance she at once made by her hearty thanks for the assistance he had rendered her on the day

before, when she was about 'to give her favourite horse "a breather" in the Row,' as she said, while laughing lightly over her fan.

With his tall figure and powerful, yet perfectly graceful, build, his dark complexion, dark moustache, and handsome mouth, Violet thought he looked not unlike one of those sombre cavaliers whom Titian and Velasquez have painted, and something far beyond 'papa's paid dependent,' as Katharine had called him, might be read, she also thought, in his face, and gathered from his high-bred gentle bearing. But, perhaps, little did he suspect, when with her company smile Miss Jermyn placed him on her left hand—the Reverend Octave had, of course, the right—that there had been an animated discussion between her and Sir Jahleel as to whether he should be accorded a place at the table at all, have his meals always in his own room, or be relegated to that of Mrs. Jellibagg, the housekeeper.

The dinner proceeded like any other, served up in such style, luxury, and profusion, such perfection of plate, crystal and fruit—fruit from hothouses, the care of a Scotch head-gardener, whose salary exceeded that of poor Sholto Douglas. Sir Jahleel liked good wine, though there was a time when he had been content enough with cheap sherry, and now his cellar was a surprising one. At the foot of the table he did the duty of host fairly well; but there ever seemed to be something in his cold, restless eyes and the peculiar wrinkles of his face that neither the best of wines nor the richest of viands could brighten.

And now to describe the family circle in which Douglas found himself installed.

Sir Jahleel was proud of his three daughters now, for they were undeniably handsome and much run after, all the more so that each would have a very large fortune; but what a mint of money their accomplishments had cost him! he sometimes thought. To look at them now, how strange it seemed that

there should have been a time when he regarded them—then babies—as the most inconvenient appendages to the cash their mother brought—appendages who disturbed his busy days, and as squalling nurslings harassed his sleepless nights, and made up fearful bills for doctors and nurses.

The late Mrs. Jermyn—she died before her husband had been knighted (nobody knew for what or why)—had become more aspiring as wealth flowed upon her husband, removing her tent further westward, till at last she pitched it in Belgravia, and in the same spirit she named her youngest daughter—the most artless one of the three—Adolphine, which she deemed both aristocratic and euphonious, but which was inevitably turned by the companions of the latter into plain ‘Dolly.’

It was from their mother—not from him certainly—that the three daughters of Sir Jahleel inherited their beauty, air of delicacy, and refinement. How much he might have loved her, in his own selfish way, it is impossible to tell. She had been dead some years now; but their union had been just what he expected it to be; the worldly advantages had been principally on his side perhaps—the beauty, the high breeding, and good birth on hers.

Katharine Jermyn, in stature above the middle height; was exquisitely fair, with ashy pale hair; but instead of the gentle expression that so generally accompanies great fairness and bright-hued hair, she had a proud, cold, and determined look, and lips that could be sweet or scornful at will. Too generally the latter, we fear, for the hauteur of her face was greatly enhanced by the under one, which was too full and pouting. In the moulding of her mouth and chin might be read a resolute will, yet her fair beauty and great grace were undeniable. The way she carried her haughty head, and the way in which she put her well-formed foot on the ground, were both indications of her pride, determination, and decision.

She was ever faultlessly dressed, in perfect taste, yet with something of simplicity. Like her sisters, all had been done that

a fashionable school could do to finish her; but, after all, there was a something in the cold light of her steely grey eyes, under their fair lashes, that repelled and chilled Douglas.

Less in stature, with a delicate and minute face, and brown hair shot with gold, Violet had a pretty pensive mouth, dark blue eyes that were alternately bright and dreamy as thought inspired her—eyes with a soft shade of tender melancholy in them—eyes most unlike—how or where did she get them?—the shifty grey orbs of Sir Jahleel.

Dolly, a fair, lithe, graceful and round-limbed English Hebe, was a fairer and younger edition of Violet. She had the same slender form, erect, even stately carriage; but with lighter coils of purely golden hair; her fairer face was equally beautiful, if less striking in feature, but more variable, playful, and childish in expression. Her eyes, of a kind of golden hazel, had ever a sudden changing and vivacious brightness in them different from the more sober dark blue eyes of Violet, and different indeed from the proud steely orbs of their eldest sister.

She had welcomed Douglas with one of her brightest smiles. She dropped a glove, either by choice or design, and as both stooped together to pick it up, their heads came sharply in contact. Smilingly, yet earnestly, he apologised.

‘Oh,’ cried Dolly, ‘don’t mind it. I am not hurt in the least!’

Then there was more laughing, and he and Dolly became friends at once; but she had a knack of being that with every one, and Vincent Sheldon, to whom she was engaged—a very prepossessing young fellow of good appearance—doted on her, and had sighed for her ever since she was in short frocks.

And as Sir Jahleel looked at her he could not help feeling astonished that the inexorable march of time—of months and years—which had not latterly produced much change in his squat, rotund figure, wrinkled front, and bald shining pate, had developed Dolly, the red-cheeked and round-limbed baby of the family, into a bright and beautiful girl, with such wonderful eyes and wonderful golden hair.

Such was the family circle in which Sholto Douglas now found himself—a unit and a dependent.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE JERMYS.

ALL around Douglas indicated wealth and luxury ; the double drawing-room, divided by a handsome arch, with festooned hangings of blue silk and silver ; the furniture, though modern, designed in charming taste, was of amboyna wood, with marqueterie inlayings and ormolu mountings in the style of Louis XVI. ; there were cabinets inlaid with plaques of Wedgwood, and Sevres china ; and marble consoles laden with statuettes, vases, and handsome things of all kinds, reflected and reproduced again and again in many a lofty mirror.

Sir Jahleel's chief friend in the City, old Mr. Sheldon (of Sheldon & Co.), had adopted the coat-armorial, supporters and all, of a long extinct baronetcy ; so he thought why should not *he*, too, adopt arms—the arms of Jermyn, or whatever might pass for such ; so, in obedience to Katharine's express desire, a shield *gules* with three pugs' heads, *or*, collared proper and *mangé*, as quartered by the *Pimlico Herald*, now figured on everything, from the carriage panels to the saltspoons.

Yet the evident splendour of his surroundings did not seem to impress or take Douglas by surprise, or to have in them aught of novelty. He behaved, or, as Miss Jermyn hinted to Vincent Sheldon, 'pretended to behave,' as if he had been accustomed to such things all his life. Yet she discovered in the course of conversation that of London life—of the opera, of flower shows and garden or water parties ; of balls, drums, and crushes ; of dinners at Richmond, of the morning in the Row, of the afternoon at Hurlingham, of the Orleans Club, and so forth—he seemed helplessly ignorant. They

were part of a sealed book to him, and would probably be so for ever, though they formed a portion of the daily life of those among whom he was now thrown as a tolerated dependent.

Notwithstanding this, he impressed Violet favourably, and she felt somehow that in tone and bearing he was altogether unlike the ordinary run of the young men with whom she had talked, danced, skated, and flirted with ease and indifference.

'Papa is vain of his pictures,' she remarked, on seeing that his eyes wandered critically over the walls; and sooth to say, Sir Jahleel Jermy *was* vain of his artistic acquisitions—not because of their merits, of which he was no judge, but of the high prices he had paid for them.

'He is a judge, then?'

'I can scarcely think so,' she replied.

'But he has some very fine things here,' resumed Douglas, naming the artist, without quitting his seat beside her on a central ottoman.

'How can you recognise the pictures thus?'

'By the style of the artist. These two battle pieces are by Rugendos; that is an Esther by Tintoretto, and—ah, there is an old friend—a Magdalene by Titian.'

'One might imagine you had seen them all painted!' said Violet laughingly.

'And here, indeed, is a gem!'

'All say so—but by whom?'

'Hans Hemling, the soldier-artist of Bruges. I have seen his famous *chasse* in the Hospital of St. John, in his native city—the "quaint old town of toil and traffic."'

She listened to him with pleasure, his voice was so singularly soft and well-modulated.

'You seem to have seen much of the world,' said she, after a pause; during which she had been slowly fanning herself, while Dolly, with Vincent Sheldon, was idling at the piano.

'In one sense I have, perhaps—not exactly the world of

fashion; yet I have been much of a wanderer — somewhat itinerant in fact.'

'Do your family reside in London?' she asked in a lower voice.

'No.'

'Where then—in Scotland?'

'All are in their graves,' said he in a very low tone.

'No brother—no sister?' asked Violet, with her soft eyes dilating in interest and wonder.

'I am the last of my family.'

'How sad a thing to say!'

'It is fortunate—perhaps.'

There was a perceptible break in his voice, and a clouding of his dark eyes, as if he had failed to finish what he meant to say; and the kind heart of the girl was stirred.

'Hence, perhaps, it is that you have wandered and travelled so much?'

'I am the man circumstances—not myself—have made me, Miss Violet,' said he, covering some real emotion by a bright smile, 'as we are told that

"A pebble in the streamlet scant,
Has turned the course of many a river;
A dew-drop on the baby-plant,
Has warped the giant oak for ever."

Violet felt a little puzzled what to make of him, and she spoke to him at intervals, with her lashes drooped, and while playing with her fan.

'You are a great reader, I suppose?'

'Yes,' said he.

'Of more than novels, I should think?'

'Yes; because often one's own life may contain more that is stirring than a dozen of novels, without being able to skip the dull, the distressing, and the sorrowful chapters; and, as a writer says, "Life is too real to be parodied."'

'Has it been so with you, Mr. Douglas?'

'In one way—yes.'

'You are ambitious, perhaps?'

'In one way—yes,' he replied again, smiling as he thought how moderate it must be, if he was content with his then position; 'thus, I would rather win and wear the Victoria Cross than the ribbon of the Garter.'

'Why?'

'Because many a titled fool and royal coward may win and wear the Garter!' he replied, with some emphasis of tone. '“Rank is but the guinea stamp,” Miss Violet.'

'Then you despise rank?' said Katharine, who, having shaken off her 'mild curate,' drew near to join in a *tête-à-tête* which she thought Violet had prolonged quite enough.

'Far from it, Miss Jermyn; but I like to see it combined with virtue, talent, and patriotism; and, as a Scotsman, I often feel disgust for the great lack of the latter so often displayed by the titled men of my own country.'

'I am no politician, and don't understand all this,' said Katharine Jermyn, fanning herself, and cresting up her head a little; 'but I presume you may have heard, with interest, that papa has a claim to a dormant Scottish peerage—Torthorwald?'

'I wish he may get it,' replied Douglas, smiling, and all unconscious that he was using a slangy London phrase, which made Katharine Jermyn colour deeply for a moment. Violet saw the mistake, and hastened to say laughingly:

'It must be a fine thing to have rank, Mr. Douglas; it must command so much that is denied even to wealth and beauty.'

'Even in these, our days, when we hear so much of professional beauties?'

'Yes; and I wonder how one feels that is a beauty of any kind?' said Violet.

'I should think none would have a more perfect idea of it than yourself,' replied Douglas, bowing.

Violet smiled and then laughed at the direct compliment,

which she felt, however, she had invoked, and which made Katharine again colour with annoyance, as the latter began—she knew not why—to dislike Douglas, and resent the calm confidence of his bearing. After a pause:

‘What flowers are you to wear at the ball to-morrow night, Kate?’ asked Violet.

‘I do not know; I have not thought of them,’ replied Miss Jermyn. ‘Have you any taste in that way, Vincent?’ she asked of Sheldon.

‘Very little,’ said he, looking at Dolly.

‘Mr. Douglas, with all your knowledge of art, you must have some taste in these matters,’ said Violet; ‘now what would suit me?’

‘A single rose, I would suggest; a pink or crimson rose—your hair is of a rich dark brown. May I place one, just to try the effect?’ he added, taking one from a vase of flowers that stood near; ‘permit me,’ he continued softly. ‘I think I can place it just where it ought to be.’

Violet’s delicate face flushed a little as his hand deftly touched the ripples of her dark-brown hair and lifted a braid from her shell-like ear, taking, so Miss Jermyn thought, much more time than was quite requisite for the office he had rather forwardly taken upon himself.

‘That simple and natural ornament is perfect!’ said he, retiring a pace to observe it, with a connoisseur look in his eyes.

‘Thank you,’ said Violet, turning her head to observe the effect in the nearest mirror.

‘Now, what will become Kate?’ asked Dolly, in a spirit of fun; ‘find something for her.’

‘A white rose.’

‘White!—surely that is false in taste!’ said Miss Jermyn, as Douglas took a soft white moss rose from the vase and handed it to her, but did not attempt to place it among *her* tresses of ashy-pale yellow. She felt the omission, the difference! and after placing it to her haughty nostrils for a moment, tossed it

on the nearest table, when it was at once appropriated by the Reverend Octave Paschal Bede, who murmured blandly :

'May I?' and placed it in his button-hole, where it looked like a tiny white cabbage.

There was a ball then on the *tapis*, to which Douglas was not to be invited, though Sir Jahleel, who had dozed off to sleep in a corner, was rather vain of the appearance and general presence of his secretary, and would not be ill-pleased that his City chum, old Sheldon, should see that he could have about him such a 'stylish' looking dependent.

So the first night of the latter in the Belgrave mansion came to an end, and ere the two guests departed, he had bowed himself off to his solitary room, all unaware that he had succeeded in making, what he had never contemplated, a decided impression upon the three sisters. In Katharine by a spirit of antagonism, in Violet of interest, in Dolly, full of her own lover, certainly pleasure in his society.

'Why not have him at our ball to-morrow night?' asked the latter.

'Better teach him his place at once,' said Miss Jermyn, with her under-lip pouted out to the full; 'we know nothing of his antecedents; he is poor, a dependent—to whom could we introduce him? As well have some of papa's clerks from the City—Mr. Smith or Mr. Penfold. What would Sir Harry Honeywood and his set think of an introduction of this kind? And as your acknowledged admirer, Violet, I doubt much if he would quite relish your retaining that rose where Mr. Douglas placed it; and still less your permitting him to touch your hair.'

'What do *you* think of him, Violet?' asked Dolly.

'That he has the manner and bearing of a gentleman, and these always come of pure unselfishness and thought for others, replied Violet, a little defiantly, as she felt Douglas had devoted himself chiefly to herself, and her eldest sister was disposed to be unjustly severe upon him.

his body was ever found. By this event Sir Jahleel's fortune was more than doubled, and he speedily became one of the most prosperous merchants and private bankers in the city of London.

Sir Jahleel was thinking over these events, and his mind grew full of sore perplexity. He was tormented by some real or fancied likeness of his late partner and also of the drowned boy—if drowned he was—which he traced in the dark face of Douglas, whom he now wished he had not seen, and whom, now that he had seen him, he feared and disliked to put away.

Sir Jahleel had more than once striven to draw from this new secretary some account of his antecedents, of his family, and so forth; but he was wary, reticent, and reluctant to speak of the past, and nothing could be gleaned from him but that he had led rather a wandering life, and was the last or only surviving member of his family.

The City knight strove to thrust the memory of the dead Selbys, father and son, from him; but it would come again and again with a curious persistency, for he remembered that it was just that night eighteen years ago that little Piercy had disappeared from Hampstead.

Meanwhile, all unconscious that he was a source of mystery or perplexity to his wealthy employer, Douglas was alone, in the seclusion of his own room, aware that the house was lighted from basement to roof, and that every moment carriages were setting down guests at the porch. There was a literal crush on the drawing-room stairs; the balcony was covered by a striped awning and lighted by Chinese lanterns, and he could hear the music of the band from time to time as he sat writing to his old friend and patron, Mr. John Charters, and curiously enough, felt, without any sense of mortification, that he had no share in the festive scene below; though, from time to time, the horse-shoe-like knit came into his brow as certain thoughts of his own occurred to him.

'I dare say you will smile,' he wrote, 'when I tell you, my dear old friend Charters, that, thanks to your kind recommendation of me, I have been engaged by Sir Jahleel Jermyn as his private secretary with a salary of £225 per annum, and have already entered on my duties. Of course, I only deem this a stepping-stone to something better; though as to what that something may be, I do not see my way as yet.

'There is a ball in progress at the house to-night—a ball to which I am, I suppose, not great enough to be invited, so I write to you in the seclusion of my own room—a somewhat lofty and remote attic. Not invited? you will exclaim. Well, to another as poor as I am this might be a mortification. To me it is—as yet—only amusing. I know who I am, and they do not, poor things! Perhaps it is a part of a system the Jermyns mean to adopt, to teach me that I must know my place, as a kind of upper servant, which, in fact, I am.

'I wonder how all this will end with me. I have barely begun my duties as secretary, and already feel the game I am playing a strange one. Old Jahleel in some way amuses and interests me, though I think he knows not what precisely to think of me, for I often detect his eyes fixed furtively upon me. I would rather not have resided in his house, though I have not a friend—even an acquaintance—in this vast Babylon. My own society has often been enough for me, and yet I don't prefer quite to live alone. I knew not that my employer had any family, or if he had, that I was to become an inmate of his house, and I would rather that his three girls were not here.

'The eldest dislikes me, and has disliked me, since first she set her cold and haughty eyes upon my face, and like her father, at times, she seems to scrutinise me curiously. Why she treats me so I know not. You will probably think that this is the prelude to a tender emotion—the Scot's way of wooing, as we say at home; but somehow, whatever she says to me—were her words soft as thistle-down—they have a sting with them.

'The second daughter is a bright and attractive girl, whom,

under happier auspices than mine, I might permit myself to admire—and even more than admire. She has won the ivory mallet, she told me, for her expertness at croquet; the golden arrow at archery; and was presented with a whip by the Master of the Brighton Harriers. But Dolly, the youngest, is the brightest of the household—a happy little creature, engaged to a good sort of young fellow named Vincent Sheldon.

‘My duties, as yet, are light. I have the tradesmen’s bills to supervise; the servants’ wages to attend to; ditto, the visiting and other lists, furnished to me by Miss Jermy, and general correspondence about subscriptions, petitions, applications, balls and opera tickets, and so forth. Without business, or business habits—without a profession and not being a chameleon and able to live on air, the work suits me. True it is, that “there is a training of the mind as of the body—to bear and endure.” However, the life that is to come may make up for much that seems, to us, hard and unequal in this.

‘The truth is, that mine is a false position, as we both know—completely false in every way; however, the present idea suits my present mood—a morbid one, you will think it; I can but live on in the certain hope for other and brighter days, though as yet the world is an empty space to me. Last year’s *Gazette* showed us that no less than five lords—all sons of peers—were promoted to commissions from the ranks; but I am a little too old to attempt to collar a position—independence, I mean—through that medium.

‘I can scarcely restrain my laughter when this full-fed Alderman of London speaks of his hoped-for succession to a Douglas peerage through some remote female branch. He looks—good, easy man—so unlike what we can imagine the inheritor of a coronet, more than all one with such a gloomy and, of old, a bloody history as that of Torthorwald. How well I know the place, with its grim feudal tower upon the green slope; with its long-neglected garden enclosed by a ruined wall, where no

flowers linger now among the rank weeds, and nettles save the white Jacobite roses in summer, as if to show that the Douglasses were true to the end.'

After he finished his letter, he had a kind of feeling or wish, for private reasons, that one addressed to his old friend, Mr. John Charters, should not be seen by Sir Jahleel or any of his family; so, instead of leaving it where letters for post were usually placed, he went forth and dropped it into the nearest postal pillar.

Passing through the brilliantly lighted hall ere he could reach the private staircase that led to his own apartment, he had an unexpected encounter.

The hall itself—long, lofty, and spacious—seemed a maze, with flushed dancers promenading for coolness; rare statues and tropical ferns in majolica jardinières adorned it; soft lights were overhead, and gaudy liveries could be seen flitting at the porch without.

The ball was in its fullest tide of gaiety. By the music Douglas knew that the Lancers were in progress, and a passing glimpse was afforded him for a moment of figures in gay and varied dresses, gliding in and out—bright faces smiling, bright eyes sparkling, like the jewels on snow-white arms and slender necks.

Hastening on, anxious only to escape upstairs unseen, Douglas suddenly found himself face to face with Miss Jermyn, dressed in a magnificent sheeny ball costume, rich with lace and splendid with jewels, leaning on the arm of a tall and handsome fellow, about thirty years of age—a man of exceedingly good style, with good-humoured blue eyes and a thick, tawny, almost golden-coloured moustache.

'You here, Douglas!' he exclaimed. 'I thought you were at Wiesbaden.'

'Sir Harry Honeywood,' stammered Douglas, mechanically presenting his hand, while intense annoyance, even chagrin,

was visible in his expressive face, and he gnawed nervously his heavy, drooping, dark moustache.

‘Discovered!’ was the first thought of Miss Jermyn. ‘Who can he be, or what can he have been?’

‘Didn’t know you knew Sir Jahleel’s family.’

‘A word with you, Sir Henry. Please to excuse us one moment, Miss Jermyn. I have a favour to ask,’ said Douglas, still looking the picture of annoyance.

The fair Katharine withdrew her gloved hand from the baronet’s arm, and stepped back a pace or two between two of the hall statues, where, holding her circular feather fan before her mouth, she eyed Douglas over it with a cold and haughty, yet very inquisitive stare.

‘What is your little game—what is the meaning of all this?’ she heard Sir Henry say, with an amused expression, in reply to some communication, hastily whispered by Douglas. ‘It all seems very odd.’

‘My poverty, but not my will consents,’ said the latter earnestly. ‘I am, as you know, a poor man—a very poor man, and have my way to make in the world. You will give me your word, Honeywood,’ were the next words that reached Katharine’s astonished ear.

‘You have it, and may depend upon me, my dear fellow. But this game won’t last.’

‘As yet, it must!’

‘By the way, did I not see you at Brighton yesterday? Of course I did.’

‘No; impossible?’ replied Douglas, looking both pained and startled now. ‘I was not out of town yesterday, and never was at Brighton on any occasion.’

‘Man alive! I bowed to you on the pier, and you responded. You had a fair-haired girl with you.’

‘Pardon; but I am detaining you,’ said Douglas, drawing back.

‘Our dance it is, I think,’ said Sir Harry, as Miss Jermyn once more took his arm.

'In a day or two my sister gives a garden-party,' said Honeywood. 'You'll come, of course. I'll see that she sends you cards, addressed to——'

'Sholto Douglas. Thanks; but gaiety is not much in my line,' replied Douglas hastily, even sharply, as they bowed and separated: and he hastened to his room with a flushed face and deeply-knitted brow, for just then his heart was full of the bitterest mortification.

'He must be mad, I think,' Sir Harry muttered in the hearing of Katharine Jermyn, as they ascended the crowded staircase; and she was conscious of feeling completely mystified, offended, and provoked, she knew not why, unless it was that here was a secret she was unable to probe or unravel.

'Mr. Douglas is papa's private secretary,' said she.

'So he told me,' replied Sir Harry, laughing and twirling his fair moustache while looking a little amused.

'You have met him abroad?'

'Oh yes.'

'Where?'

'Oh, at those places where one meets everybody.'

'Indeed,' said Katharine, opening and shutting her fan somewhat vigorously; 'was he Mr. Douglas then?'

'Yes,' replied Sir Harry, turning to her with some surprise in his good-humoured, but usually vacant fair face.

'And what is he now?'

'Mr. Douglas still, and your papa's secretary. Why, Miss Jermyn, what do you mean?' he asked, laughing again, as his arm encircled her waist, and they glided away into the maze of waltzers.

But Katharine Jermyn was intensely dissatisfied, and finding that she could elicit nothing from him, she resolved to entrust the task to Violet, whose acknowledged admirer and future *fiancé* the wealthy hussar baronet was supposed to be; but probably Violet was indifferent on the subject, for she met with no better success.

'There is something mysterious about him—more than mysterious,' said Katharine, as she and her sisters were disrobing after the last of their guests had departed, and the birds were twittering in the light July morning in the spacious gardens of the square; 'and I have a theory of my own on the subject.'

'What is it?' asked Dolly, half asleep, as she coiled up the masses of her golden hair without the aid of maid or dresser.

'Simply this, that where there is mystery there must be guilt or——'

'What?' exclaimed Dolly, with a startled expression.

'Something shameful to conceal.'

'How can you be so severe—so suspicious, Kate?' asked the gentler Violet, as with snowy hands she smoothed her dark brown braids.

'It may be, as I have often suspected from his having been in so many places, that he has been some one's courier, and kind Sir Harry Honeywood has promised to keep his secret.'

'Can you think so, in the face of a promise—or offer—to get him a card for his sister's garden-party?' asked Violet.

'I own to being perplexed—and dissatisfied too.'

'Shall we take him with us in the carriage?'

'Certainly not, Violet!' was the sharp response of Miss Jermyn; 'and I shall make papa question him.'

For some reasons of his own, Sir Jahleel was reluctant to trouble himself in the matter; nevertheless, as he had been made *au fait* of the meeting in the hall, when the ball was talked of next day at luncheon (with doubtful taste in the presence of one who had *not* been invited), he mentioned, as if in a casual manner:

'You seem to be known to Sir Harry Honeywood, Mr. Douglas?'

'Yes, I know him.'

At this way of replying Katharine raised her light brown eyebrows.

'And you have met before?' resumed Sir Jahleel.

'Oh, yes, in many places on the Continent.'

'Where I suppose he did you a service?' suggested Miss Jermyn.

'Excuse me; where I had the good fortune to do *him* a very important service.'

'How?'

'By saving his life one night from two armed robbers in the Largo-del-Mercatello at Naples.'

'And thus, perhaps, you became acquainted?'

'And thus we became acquainted,' he replied, using her own words, and for the first time a little hauteur became infused in his usually gentle, soft, and resigned manner, more especially as he detected the cold, hard, fishy eyes of his employer regarding him again furtively and, strange to say, uneasily; but he knew not the secret question of Sir Jahleel's heart—the remembrance, real or fancied, of another face whenever he saw the face of him—Douglas.

CHAPTER V.

A PERSON NAMED SCROWLE.

SHOLTO DOUGLAS was busy in the forenoon with his daily work, noting and docketing accounts and letters, and so forth, when Sir Jahleel entered, a little fussily. He seated himself in an easy chair, and, carefully wiping his gold spectacles, placed them on his rather short nose, in a peculiar way he had when he wished to survey Douglas closely and steadily, as if from behind the shield of the glasses.

'Have you sorted the—the what d'ye call them, notes I gave you?' he asked, a little pompously.

'The pedigree, Sir Jahleel?'

'Yes.'

'I have ; but they are very crude and confused ; and I have written them out, with some additions, furnished by my own knowledge.'

'Thanks ; when we refer it to the College of Heralds——'

'That office can do no more for you, Sir Jahleel, in this matter, than Bow Street,' said Douglas, smiling.

'How—what, then ?' asked Sir Jahleel testily.

'The Lyon King of Arms, the Court of Session and a Committee of Privileges must sift the matter for you, and by the time you have gone through all three——'

'Well, sir—well ; I don't care about expense ; so what then ?'

Douglas smiled and was silent, as he thought :

'I fear you will be no nearer this peerage than you are now, Sir Jahleel Jermy.''

The latter, who was in a lofty and pompous mood that forenoon, said :

'Take up your pen, and write to my dictation to Mr. Charters, the lawyer in Edinburgh.'

Douglas started visibly at the name of Charters, but placed a sheet of note-paper before him, dipped his pen in the ink-horn, and bowed, to intimate that he was ready ; so the knight began to dictate thus :

'MY DEAR CHARTERS,—

'As I learn from many sources that the late Lord Torthorwald died abroad, in great obscurity and without any direct heirs, and as you are already aware of my claim to his peerage, through a remote female branch, I wish that you would, without delay, find all the necessary proofs—first, of his death, etc. ; second, that all the male collateral branches are exhausted or defunct ; and third, my own proximity. One of my daughters is soon to be married to the heir of my old friend Sheldon ; the others will soon follow, I have no doubt, in the same way. At my death, each of them will have a fortune of far above £100,000 ; thus the title of Torthorwald will not suffer in my hands, as I have the where-

with to gild the coronet as, I suppose, it was never gilded before. So set to work at once, and spare no expense.'

'Is that all, sir?' asked Douglas.

'All,' replied Sir Jahleel, as he signed the letter and tossed it to his secretary to fold and address.

Douglas sighed and smiled faintly as he did so; to him there seemed something grotesque in this corpulent and easy-going City knight—this turtle-fed son of Gog and Magog—thinking of claiming kindred with and assuming the title of the fierce old Lords of Torthorwald, whose names, like their swords, were steeped in blood, and whose castle, a massive and picturesque ruin, built—as the Scots of old built—not for time but eternity, surmounts a green eminence on the road between Dumfries and Lockerby.

The first lord of the line—a son of the famous Regent Morton—lies under a slab between two pillars in the Church of Holyrood, and thereon is recorded that he was slain in the adjacent street in 1608. 'There,' says the 'Domestic Annalist of Scotland,' 'the guide reads his name daily to hundreds of visitors, few of whom know what series of tragic circumstances in old Scottish history lie concentrated in the body of him who sleeps below.'

'As one of the Douglas name,' said the secretary, turning to his notes, his dark face lighting up with one of his most pleasant smiles, 'all this is very interesting to me, Sir Jahleel. We have a doggerel rhyme in Scotland which says—

" Oh, so many and so good
Of the Douglasses have been,
Never more of our surname,
In Scotland were seen."

'Well, after him who lies in Holyrood, we have Lord William, who was captain of the Scottish Horse Guard in 1641; the Lord John who fell at Tangiers; the Lord William, who sold his union vote for £1,000,' ('Sensible man!' said Sir Jahleel

parenthetically)—‘and whose youngest son’s second daughter, Katharine, was your ancestor.’

‘You are well up in the annals of my family,’ said Sir Jahleel pompously; ‘oh, it is all plain as a pikestaff; but old John Charters must do all I have asked him—our propinquity with her can be proved by my solicitors here.’

‘He was no ornament to the Scottish Peerage, the Lord William referred to,’ said Douglas.

‘How?’ asked Sir Jahleel.

‘Discarding his own wife, he became enamoured of the daughter of a poor cottar—a girl remarkable for her beauty and modesty, and often commanded her father, as his vassal, to bring her to Torthorwald and leave her there; but the father said that he would rather see her in her grave. One day he did bring her by chance, when paying his rent in kind; but could not be prevailed upon, either by threats or bribes, to leave her behind him. As they took the road to Lockerby, Lord William sat at an upper window with a musketoon. He fired at the cottar, but shot the unfortunate girl! This was deemed an accident; but it was an accident which the cottar repaired by planting his dirk in the false lord’s heart when next he paid his rent at Torthorwald.’

‘He was hanged, of course?’

‘Not at all.’

‘What, then?’

‘He fled to Low Germany, and fell with the Scots Brigade before Ghent.’

‘This devil of a story won’t help me much,’ said Sir Jahleel impatiently; ‘but this title made clear,’ he continued, as he lay back in his cosy chair, smiling more blandly than was his wont, his fingers interlaced upon his paunch, and his thumbs twiddling over each other alternately, ‘this title made clear, I say, I shall have to adopt your name, Mr. Douglas—rather amusing, isn’t it?—and quarter the arms of Torthorwald with my own.’

Douglas smiled in spite of himself, as he thought of the three pugs' heads *mangé*, quartered with the crowned heart and three stars of the Lord of Castle Dangerous, though similar heraldic farces occur every day.

'Hard to change one's name,' continued Sir Jahleel, 'a good old City name, too—even for a title.'

In the idea of advancing a claim to this dormant—some said extinct peerage—he was spurred on chiefly by the ambition and vanity of his eldest daughter, Katharine, who, in fancy, already saw the prefix of 'Hon.' to her name, her presentation at Court, and the way to a titled marriage opened up, when once her family figured in the somewhat unpatriotic and unhallowed pages of the Scottish peerage roll; while her father, on the other hand, for some urgent reasons of his own, was very loth to have the antecedents of his household, of his business, and more especially all that referred to himself, dragged forth for public inspection.

This emotion struggled with the suddenly fostered ambition. Sir Jahleel was not very imaginative, neither was he in the least poetical, yet he did indulge in the creation of several castles in the air, among which were the marriage of his daughters to men of position and title—events probable enough, considering their own attractions, wealth, and opportunities.

'I do not understand,' said he, after a pause, 'my friend Mr. John Charters's action, or rather want of action, in this peerage matter, and my daughter, Miss Jermyn, urges that I should employ some other legal man in Scotland; but to those who wait everything comes in time, and so in time, as I am not so impatient as she is, I shall no doubt be Lord Torthorwald, and perhaps a representative peer.'

'I hope soon to congratulate you; but though these matters go slowly there is nothing in the end like success,' replied Douglas, laughing. 'Are we not told that—

"It is success that colours all in life;
Success makes fools admired—makes villains honest;

All the proud virtue of this vaunting world
Fawns on success and power, however acquired."

'What is it that you are talking about, and who is thinking of villains?' asked Sir Jahleel sulkily, as his face grew dark.

'I was simply quoting Thomson, Sir Jahleel,' replied Douglas with manifest surprise at his tone, and added, to change the subject:

'By the way, sir, a gentleman was here to-day wanting anxiously to see you.'

'About this peerage claim?'

'No—at least he did not say so—he left his card,' said Douglas, searching over his writing-table. 'Oh, here it is,' he added, presenting, with an open smile, a rather soiled piece of pasteboard, on which was written, not engraved, the name of

'Mr. Joab Scrowle.'

Sir Jahleel started as if a wasp had stung him, and as he snatched the card, said angrily—almost savagely:

'At what are you laughing, sir?'

'Pardon me, Sir Jahleel,' replied Douglas, with some dignity of manner; 'I was *not* laughing.'

'Smiling, then?'

'Certainly—at the curious vulgarity of the name.'

'It is odious—horrid, I grant you!'

'Suitable to his aspect, certainly.'

'Scrowle—did *you* ever see him before, Mr. Douglas?' asked Sir Jahleel, with undisguised perturbation.

'Not that I am aware of.'

'Never, even in your boyhood?'

Douglas was struck by the question and the tone in which it was asked. So he replied haughtily:

'When or how should I have seen such a person?'

Sir Jahleel eyed him keenly, covertly, even savagely through his gold-rimmed glasses, and thought: 'How much or how little of this am I to believe?'

'Did he ask—was he—did he seem quite sober?' said Sir Jahleel.

'Quite; though a dissipated-looking creature.'

A pause ensued, during which Douglas resumed his work, and Sir Jahleel stared thoughtfully out of the window. He had now begun to have more undefined and uncomfortable feelings about Douglas, whose face, by its likeness to some one else, had startled him at their first interview. He could not understand his apparently ubiquitous character, and his recognition by Sir Harry Honeywood, the 'great card' of his circle of visitors; and now Scrowle, who was—for reasons to be told anon—peculiarly his *bête noir*, had unexpectedly turned up!

He would perhaps have dispensed with Douglas's service altogether, but he was loth just at this particular time to offend his legal friend, Mr. Charters, the special agent for the late Lord Torthorwald; and, moreover, he found in the conducting of his correspondence that Douglas, by his docility, intelligence, and knowledge of foreign languages, was of infinite service and use to him.

'Scrowle!' he muttered, and seemed to be strongly agitated by anger, hate, and no slight amount of genuine fear. 'Mr. Douglas,' he said emphatically, 'if that man should ever again call in my absence, I have to acquaint you, that you must hold no communication with him verbally, and reply to none he may make you in writing, but bring his letter at once to me!'

'Very good, sir,' replied Douglas, as Sir Jahleel abruptly withdrew; but he could not help thinking, 'To what mystery is the name of Scrowle the key?'

And he could not help remarking that for the remainder of that day the wealthy City knight and ex-alderman had a very disturbed, abstracted, and all but haggard expression in his face, especially when he looked at *him*!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUD OF LOVE.

DOUGLAS duly received, under cover from Sir Harry Honeywood, a card for the garden-party of the latter's sister, Lady Basset. To decline it—his first thought—might seem ungracious, so he accepted the invitation, and the day of the *fête* at length came—and, little foreseeing how that day was to end with him, he took his way to Richmond, in the vicinity of which, and near the Thames, amid the loveliest sylvan scenery, he found himself, as he thought, with one of his strange smiles, 'a denizen of that revolving purgatory, which goes by the name of genial society.'

The summer day was clear and bright, and the varied scenery of Richmond woods, gardens, villas, cottages, and fields in the highest cultivation and verdure, were in all their beauty; and when he entered the spacious grounds of Basset House the *fête* was at its height; brilliant costumes, worn by fashionable, and in many instances beautiful, women made all the place gay.

There were the clear blue river and an artificial pond for those to row upon who chose; lawn-tennis on the lawn for others; the winding paths of the shady and leafy shrubberies for promenaders to admire the gorgeous hues of the geraniums on terrace and in parterre, the magnificent Gloire de Dijon roses and the variegated asters. There were the long and brilliant conservatories to wander through and flirt in, and from thence, if the heat of the sun proved too great, access could be had to the cool and stately drawing-room, the library, and the billiard-room; and a Hussar band from Hounslow made the whole place resound with music, while giving *éclat* and importance to the assemblage.

Amid the crowd, Douglas had some difficulty in discovering his hostess, a wealthy widow and elegant woman of fashion;

many were present, like himself, who were strangers to her, but she had the same bright stereotyped smile of welcome for all, and, touching his hand, she passed on to some one else, and he saw her no more. Rather avoiding than seeking introductions, he found himself isolated and somewhat lonely—regretting, indeed, that he had come.

Garden and other chairs were placed on the lawn and about the grounds, and there were bright-coloured rugs spread on the grass for those who preferred them; but the place where the band played was the chief rallying place of the company, of whom, as usual at such gatherings, the great majority were ladies; and there he saw Vincent Sheldon hovering, of course, about the golden-haired Dolly, who was the centre of a circle of good-looking young fellows, with all of whom she maintained a cross-fire of smart and winning speeches.

To Vincent her soft beauty and childish baby-manner were perfection, and one glance of her merry eyes could always bring him to her side. There, too, seated in a garden sofa, were Katharine Jermyn, attired in pale lilac silk with white lace, with the Reverend Octave Paschal Bede, and among other admirers the tall and fair-haired Sir Harry, hanging over the back of the seat. The latter knew right well that the blonde beauty's best poses, graceful though they were, had all been carefully studied and gone through before, yet he admired her quite as much apparently as the more artless Violet; thus it was often difficult to divine which sister he most affected.

His would-be but certainly hopeless rival, the curate, was a handsome man, with fair hair parted in the middle, a lisp, and moustache; he played lawn-tennis, sang operatic melodies, and when at Barons Hall had usually a bevy of girls, embroidering screens and altar cloths (often slippers for himself), with whom to consult about the decoration of the church at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, when the said decoration was curiously mingled with piety, the language of the flowers, and no little amount of flirtation; but haughty Katharine Jermyn was the

goddess of his idolatry, even while the thought of her many thousands and *his* slender curacy made that idolatry hopeless, and even then she was laughingly assuring him in reply to some remark that she thought 'the most silly object on earth was a man in love.'

'Talking of a man in love, here comes Douglas !' exclaimed Sir Harry, as the former lifted his hat to Miss Jermyn, who accorded him a bow and the faintest of smiles as he was passing on, but the Baronet seized his hand, saying laughingly, 'You sly dog, it was you I saw at Brighton, dressed exactly as you are now.'

'Excuse me, Sir Harry, but I never in the course of my life was there,' replied Douglas.

'Why, man, I would know you by the knit in your forehead among a hundred men, and even the pretty girl who was with you failed to soften it out.'

Douglas shrugged his shoulders and passed on, as if he wished to hear no more on the subject ; but Katharine Jermyn saw that the knit referred to deepened, that he started when it was spoken of, and that his expression grew black as a thundercloud.

'What do you think of him, Sir Harry?' she asked.

'Who—my friend Douglas?'

'Yes.'

'That he is a gentleman every inch, and would make a splendid soldier. By Jove, it is a pity he is not one !'

The haughty girl fanned herself, and dropped the subject ; while Douglas, as if driven away by some mistake that he cared not to contest, passed on towards the lawn, where the tennis players were busy, and there among the spectators, he came upon Violet Jermyn, seated in a garden chair, under the shadow of a great elm-tree, and almost alone.

Bowing, he was about to pass on, when with a smile and a motion of her closed parasol, she beckoned him to her side. She was attired in two shades of blue velvet, a colour that well

became the style of her beauty and delicate wild roseleaf complexion, and her costume fitted her to perfection. Seeing that he had not manifested an intention of joining her, from diffidence perhaps, she at once took the initiative in conversation.

'Garden-parties are all the amusement of the hour, Mr. Douglas,' said she; 'you have been at one before, of course?'

'Once—but not in this country.'

'Where then?'

'In Germany,' he answered evasively.

'A garden-party is an excellent occasion for showing civility to a wide range of guests—and to many who are perhaps strangers to the host and hostess.'

'Like myself—and to many whom it might prove inconvenient to entertain otherwise—it is certainly elastic in that sense, Miss Violet.'

'Lady Basset, however, cannot deem you a stranger,' said she, 'after the great service you did her brother in Italy.'

To this, in his usually reticent spirit, he made no remark; so after a pause, she spoke again.

'Is it true, Mr. Douglas, that some of the society papers, as they are called, have hinted about papa's peerage claim, and have ventured to ridicule it?'

'I have not heard; but on *what* ground did they attempt to ridicule it?' he asked with some interest.

'I cannot tell; but papa says you know the place, Thorwald—a funny name, it sounds like German—from whence the title comes.'

'I know it well. I have played amid the great ruins often when a boy, scaring the cawing rooks from their nests in the stone arched hall. I think I see the place now, with the white butterflies fluttering on the green grass, the honey bees humming on the purple heather; and then the perfume of the wild whin bushes—that subtle perfume which is said to be like those of the strawberry and the apricot combined.'

'You talk quite like a poet or a painter, Mr. Douglas,' said she laughingly, while her long dark lashes drooped, for she knew that though she saw little of Douglas she was sensible of a strange pleasure when conversing with him. He knew, read, and had seen so much that she seemed to breathe a purer and more intellectual atmosphere when with him, and that he never left her without somehow impressing her with new and higher views of human nature and her fellow-creatures. He observed that when Violet spoke of the important probability of her father's accession to the dormant peerage that her tone and manner were diffident, and very different from that of her sister Katharine.

'And Torthorwald is now a ruin—how sad !'

'Yes ; but a ghost occupies one chamber—another was the scene of a murder, ages ago, and bats and rooks are everywhere in and about the keep.'

'What a traveller you must be !' she exclaimed. 'You seem to have been everywhere and seen everything. Daily we read and are told that this is not an age of adventure or romance, and even that perfect purity of sentiment is a thing of the past.'

'And that true gallantry went out of fashion with the doublet and rapier, just as chivalry did with the lance and coat of mail.'

'Now, I don't believe that either have gone out of fashion a bit !' said she, with a pretty air of positiveness, but he sighed and remained silent, with his eyes fixed on the distant windings of the river, which shone like silver between its wooded borders.

'And the ghost that haunts Torthorwald, what is it like ?' she asked.

'A grim and dark man—one of the Black Douglasses, as they were called, with Ramillie wig on his head, a ferocious knit in his brow, and a musketoon in his hand, looking over a window in nights when the moon is clear and bright.'

'Oh, this is too awfully absurd !' she exclaimed with a silvery laugh.

Always pleasing though he was, there was now much in his manner, an indefinable something which neither she nor her sister could define or fathom. In Katharine it roused a spirit of antagonism, as we have shown. In Violet it excited a curious interest.

It happened that just at that moment she dropped one of her ear-rings unconsciously, and picking it up, he handed it to her.

‘How provoking,’ she exclaimed, ‘with my gloved hands I cannot clasp it.’

This was after various efforts, which displayed—by her posing—the graceful contour of her head and neck, the beautiful form of her hands, and the rare delicacy of her arms, a little way above the gold bracelet that encircled her slender wrist.

‘May I assist you—allow me?’ said he softly, while drawing nearer her, a tenderness pervading his tone, as he took the jewel from her hand and put it into the small, shell-like ear, but his hand trembled as he did so. Violet felt the tremulous manner in which the ear-ring was inserted and clasped, but knew not that a sudden thrill passed through the heart of Douglas as his fingers touched her delicate neck and—just by chance, we suppose—her soft, rich hair.

A little colour rushed into her cheek, as she just seemed to become conscious that she was availing herself of his services and conducting their interview as if they had known each other for months instead of a few days.

‘Thanks,’ said she, and turned towards him. Their eyes met, and with the meeting there came, swift as lightning into the hearts of both—as if each could read the sudden thoughts of the other—a mysterious consciousness, a startling prevision, that the future would never be vague like the past, and that to them to-morrow would never be like yesterday!

The commonplaces that were uttered now, on subjects far from their own thoughts, neither perhaps ever remembered. A tiny bird on the extreme end of a twig clutched in its slender

claws, was singing aloud in the sunshine, in the gladness of its heart, and to Sholto Douglas somehow the bird was always associated in after times with the eyes of Violet and the little episode of her ear-ring.

The heart of Violet Jermyn was stirred now as it had never been stirred before. The touch of his hand, the sound of his modulated voice, which at times seemed to have a chord in it, all roused something in her breast she had never known, and though sweet and strange, was something that she dared scarcely acknowledge to herself as yet.

She only knew that a sweet, tender, and subtle change was stealing into her inner and secret life, and that to be with him was happiness.

There is a subtle power in the love which keeps silence, mightier than all love's eloquence. A hand that trembles when it touches another, one swift look from loving eyes, or a sigh or tone, will tell more than an oration.

And he—she asked of herself—how was he affected? She could not discover as yet, for diffidence and the difference of their position would fetter his tongue at least.

Such envious suspicions as filled the heart of Katharine Jermyn had never occurred to the gentler Violet or the happy light-hearted Dolly. Conscious of, and attracted now by, the perfect courtesy of Douglas, by a subtle shade of secret pain and sorrow, which she could read at times in the depth of his dark eyes, Violet wove around him some sad and mysterious story which excited all her woman's instinct and the romance of her girlish nature; and in the end we may show that she was the most shrewd judge of his character and position in the world.

Violet's heart was susceptible of emotions warm and deep. It was only just awakening, as a writer says, 'to a sense of its capacity for loving; any person in trouble or sorrow was more interesting to her than a prosperous and happy man or woman' and Douglas seemed neither prosperous nor over happy, though gentle, and, to all appearance, resigned to a humble fate.

The garden-party, with all its gay details, proceeded like any other ; but, although to Douglas and Violet it was now invested with a new and sudden interest, I doubt very much if they at all observed them, for when she rose from her seat, they strolled away unconsciously to the remoter parts of the lawn, and to the walk beside the river, conversing in a somewhat disjointed manner.

‘How romantic all this is!’ exclaimed Violet ; ‘the long vista of shady elms, the swans and water-lilies in the river, and Basset House in the distance’—a house in which George II. and Queen Caroline resided after the former purchased it from the Earl of Arran.

‘I hope I have still a taste for the beautiful,’ replied Douglas ; ‘and there was some romance in me once, Miss Violet, but now it has all died away.’

‘At your years?’ she said, looking up at him with her soft and candid eyes ; ‘I should imagine that it had just begun.’

‘In one sense it has—but——’

He paused, and her white lids dropped beneath his gaze. She read ill-concealed admiration and tenderness in his eye. Violet had many admirers, but as yet she had given a thought to none of them. Now the matter was different, or speedily becoming so.

‘I must learn to forget my early dreams, Miss Violet, to outlive my former self,’ he resumed, feeling the necessity for saying something ; ‘and I may become, who knows, a great something in the City at last,’ he added, with a laugh, half dreary and rather contemptuous.

‘Have you—so young—no higher desire, no higher hope than that?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘And you wait its realisation?’

‘That I can scarcely say ; though it is averred that everything comes in time to those who wait. I have known already what it is to turn from the hopes of ambition cherished for

years—boyish years at least—to turn from the sun-gilded heights and descend into the dull, grey, level plain ; to relinquish the ideal with all its fair visions, and become——’

‘What ?’ she asked softly and with surprise.

‘Well, Miss Violet, what I am now.’

This was painful and puzzling for the girl to listen to, just then, though it seemed as if—in a sudden bitterness of the heart—he was speaking less to her than to himself. Then he suddenly seemed to remember this, and with a flush in his brown cheek asked her pardon for intruding his own thoughts upon her.

‘Mr. Douglas, I have nothing to pardon you for,’ said she simply and sweetly, colouring in turn ; ‘but I fear we have wandered too far from the centre of attraction—the band.’

‘You have, indeed,’ said Sir Harry Honeywood, coming suddenly upon them, with a bright, yet Douglas thought, peculiar, expression in his fair and usually vacant face ; ‘the band has been gone some time ; Miss Jermyn has been looking for you everywhere, and has sent me after you, as the carriage waits.’

Douglas lifted his hat and drew back with a bow, not even venturing to touch her hand as Violet departed in charge of one in whom he feared to find a rival, and a very formidable one, for Sir Harry seemed to be already quite *l’ami du maison* with the family of Sir Jahleel.

‘You have certainly distinguished yourself to-day !’ said Katharine cuttingly, when she had Violet captive in the carriage and was driving home.

‘Distinguished myself—how ?’ asked Violet, blushing deeply.

‘I am glad to see that you do blush !’

‘For what, Kate ?’

‘Absenting yourself from your own circle, and permitting Mr. Douglas to escort you—to hang about you almost like a lover.’

'Kate—absurd !

'Absurd, indeed ! what will Sir Harry and his sister, Lady Basset, think ?—what would papa say if I told him ?'

'Oh, don't make a fuss about nothing, Kate,' said Vincent Sheldon, who sat opposite Violet in the carriage and saw how much pain and annoyance were expressed in her soft face. 'I have no doubt that if she permitted Douglas, who seems to be the king of good fellows, to remain near, it was because he was a total stranger to everyone there but ourselves ; and you know, Kate, how kindhearted she is.'

'Thank you, Vincent dear,' said Violet ; 'you have said for me precisely what I was about to say for myself without the least piece of self-flattery.'

'You lower papa, yourself, and our whole position by this kind of thing,' persisted the imperious Miss Jermyn.

'I do not see that I do—your ideas, Kate, are quite extravagant,' replied poor Violet ; 'Mr. Douglas seems a polished gentleman, who, though young, has seen much of the world in perhaps better days. I cannot tell what he has been.'

'I hate your "has beens !"' exclaimed Katharine Jermyn, with a steely flash in her cold grey eye.

'Sir Harry knows'—Violet began to urge.

'Oh, don't talk of Sir Harry ; but in these our most unromantic days it is positively quite refreshing to find a young lady interested in a prince in disguise !'

'Oh, Kate, how merciless you are !' exclaimed Dolly.

'I can't help my suspicions,' continued her elder sister ; 'why does he deny so persistently being at Brighton, when Sir Harry is so positive that he saw him there ?'

'Because, Kate, it must be some case of mistaken identity. I have been thinking over it.'

'Have you ?'

Her full under-lip pouted as she spoke.

'Yes—and find that he was with us in London the whole of

the day in question ; and if he were not, of what matter is it to us ?

‘ Nothing, of course ; but I think you might reflect on things of more importance to yourself.’

‘ Surely, Kate, dear, the same rule applies to you. Why so full of interest in all that concerns Mr. Douglas ?’ retorted Violet ; but she coloured perceptibly.

Provoked to be suspected—suspected *already*—of a secret interest in the young secretary, she pursed up her sweet lips, and nervously twirled in her tightly-gloved little hand the ivory handle of the tiny parasol that rested on her shoulder, and said no more ; but she felt grateful to Dolly and Vincent, who were warm in their praises of Douglas.

‘ I find that I am in a minority—enough of this, please,’ said Katharine sharply ; and then she remained silent till the carriage drew up at their porch in the square, where two pompous ‘ Jeameses ’ in plush and powder were in waiting.

Meanwhile Douglas, full of new thoughts, was slowly walking homeward to the same point.

The mutual glance—the *bud* of love, it seemed—dwelt keenly in his memory. Delight, mingled strongly with the opposing emotions of pain and even alarm—emotions which he would have found no small trouble in defining—filled his heart as he confessed to himself that he had fallen in love with Violet Jermy—*in love with her almost at first sight—ridiculous as that is alleged to be ; and ere long further intercourse and acquaintance must, he knew, have the usual and inevitable effect of developing that love—a hopeless and useless one, as he felt it must be, for the daughter of a wealthy parvenu—sweet, beautiful, and all-accomplished though she was—the daughter of a man whom he did not quite respect or esteem ; whose claim to a title, he thought, though perhaps absurd, might increase the gap between them, and to whom he owed his daily bread, the most painful and mortifying reflection of all.*

Days passed on after this, and though, as he had anticipated,

her voice, face, figure, her manner and her whole image, became a part of his existence, he did not again venture to look into her eyes as he had done on that day of the garden-party.

Had he gone away from her circle, away from her influence and her society, he might only have remembered her as a charming girl, and after a time might, in the course of things, have forgotten her altogether; but his office as her father's secretary was his food and raiment, his only inheritance for the time, and so he remained a dependent in that huge mansion of Belgravia.

From the day of the garden-party he was conscious of being treated with more cordiality by all save Miss Jermyn; but still the bearing of Sir Jahleel towards him was an enigma, puzzling. He seemed to be always furtively watching him.

'For whom or for what does he take me?' thought Douglas.

Vincent Sheldon and Dolly soon discovered that he was a proficient in music, had a fine tenor voice, and was a first-rate hand at impromptu charades and amateur theatricals; he shone at the subsequent suppers, for the bonbons at which he wrote special mottoes; arranged that the ices should come straight from Gunter's, saw that the truffles were fresh, the flowers, eggs and *foie gras* all in the best form. Moreover, that at one or two carpet-dances he had proved a finished waltzer, all of which, with many other qualifications, went far to make him popular with both, and we need scarcely add, with Violet; but all this was perilous work for *him*.

Miss Jermyn viewed with growing disdain this rapid change in the family politics, conceiving that the mystery surrounding Douglas had been rather increased than diminished since the garden-party, and remarked to Violet, in her usual spirit, that a man so serene in manners and action, and ever ready to be useful, would be sure to be taken by friends and visitors, '*not* for papa's private secretary, but a poor relation of the family.'

Mr. John Charters did not reply immediately to the letter dictated by Sir Jahleel, who ere long was fated to have less pleasant work than pegage-hunting cut out for him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BUD IN BLOOM.

THE natural result of a perilous propinquity was that the young secretary began to cherish a secret and hopeless love for Violet Jermyn—a love unspoken, and checked in its growth by the steady suspicion of Katharine, who certainly did not yet quite realise the idea that he would dare to think of such a thing—a love, too, marred and clouded by the frequent appearance of Sir Harry Honeywood in the house, and his attendance on the sisters in the Row and elsewhere.

In his loneliness, or rather friendlessness, in London, the interest that Violet had manifested in Douglas—the growing conviction that a subtle and secret union of thought was gradually beginning to exist between them—born of eye meeting eye—was sweet to think over—sweet to brood upon in his hours of solitude.

‘Better not give way to this,’ he would reflect; ‘better not, a thousand times!’ he would mutter; ‘and better to avoid her, even if she loved me! There are some people who are born to be unlucky, and I am one of these! There are whole families born to be unfortunate, and mine is one of these! Evil fortune lies upon them—upon all they attempt and all they do—upon all who wed with them; they *cannot* prosper, and never do, from the cradle to the grave. Is it not Ouida who says, “It is a terrible thing—a horrible thing—those inherited memories that are born in young hearts with the blood of others?” and with these memories comes to me a conviction of the hopelessness of success.’

His handsome face was overspread with a deep sad gloom, and the stern knit, which he said was a family peculiarity, furrowed his brow.

If Sir Harry Honeywood had any intentions regarding Violet,

he did not show them in any very distinct way, as far as Douglas could see; yet, from what passed around him, he was led to infer that a proposal might soon be expected, though much of the former's time was necessarily spent with his regiment at Brighton.

Once Douglas heard Vincent Sheldon say to Miss Jermyn :

'Sir Harry is in town; I met him in the Row to-day. He has been here, of course?'

'No,' she replied.

'Not to see you or Violet?'

'No.'

'That surprises me.'

'It does not surprise me,' remarked Dolly, 'for our Hussar friend reminds me very much of Captain Macheath and his song.'

'How, Dolly?' asked Miss Jermyn.

'With regard to you, Kate, and Violet—"How happy could I be with either, were t'other dear charmer away."'

It was indeed difficult for an onlooker, however interested, to analyse the intentions, if any, of the lounging and good-humoured baronet; for really he seemed to be, as Dolly hinted, pretty equally divided between Katharine and Violet, or preponderating a little towards the latter, in the way of bouquets, music, and graceful little presents such as a young girl may accept from a present admirer and prospective lover; and Douglas, whatever was growing in his heart, felt his own position too humble and hopeless to be even jealous of his whilom continental friend.

If Douglas had come down in the world either by his own folly or the wickedness of others, one fact was apparent to Katharine Jermyn, and to her a rather puzzling one, that Sir Harry Honeywood still seemed to recognise him as a species of equal: though it has been truly said that 'Your notable on his travels, so cordial and so gushing, is apt to give you the cut direct in his own hunting grounds at home.'

And yet, according to what she could gather from young Sheldon and others, Sir Harry had houses and lands, plate, pictures, and horses—a deer forest in Scotland, a snipe bog in Ireland, a fishing ch  let in Norway, and was ‘justly popular in society, because he was enormously rich.’ He drove a mailphaeton, had six hunters at Brighton, and rooms in town furnished with unusual luxury.

Thus, though intimate and fellow travellers in the past, difference of circumstances and position now made Douglas, who was proud, reserved, and sensitive, sedulously avoid if he could the chances of meeting Sir Harry, or renewing their former footing. Thus he failed to learn from him, as he might otherwise have done, the precise footing on which he was with the sisters—with Violet in particular.

To this past intimacy between Sir Harry and Douglas, Katharine Jermyn, with all her curiosity and ingenuity, failed to obtain any clue. Sir Harry always said laughingly:

‘I have given the poor fellow my promise on some matters, and keep it. What would he think of me if I broke my word?’

‘Promise; there is something to conceal then?’ continued Kate, her handsome face full of intense pique. ‘Perhaps he is married, then—has a wife and children?’

‘I think I may assure you that such is not the case,’ replied Sir Harry, with one of the heartiest laughs in which she had seen him indulge.

Douglas declined all the invitations of the latter to his rooms or his club, till he ceased to press them, declaring that he was ‘a deuced eccentric fellow—off his nut,’ and so forth, ‘and was acting in a way that no fellow could understand.’

At times Sir Jahleel sent him down to Barons Hall, in Sussex, to take a ride for inspection over the estate; to arrange as to the shooting and fishing, and to interview the land steward—and each visit he paid there, by the evidences of wealth and splendour he saw, impressed him more and more with the conviction of how fatuous it was to encourage the fancy that

possessed him, and the necessity there was for quitting the abode of the prosperous merchant and banker ; and lingering yet, he would not put this resolution in force, and tear himself away.

The knowledge that the sisters were at balls, routs, concerts, at operatic entertainments (his sole share in which had been to secure the places for them), scenes where Sir Harry and others were, and *he* was *not*, began to gall him now as it had never galled him before ; and quitting the solitude of his room, he would wander for hours in the busy streets, as if to kill thought, watching the thousands of lamps, like long garlands of fire, stretching away in mighty vistas, feeling in equal solitude even then, amid the brilliantly-lighted shops, the hurrying human tides, and the thousands of equipages that rolled past in every direction.

And anon a species of contentment would come to his heart when, by the return of the carriage, the sounds in the hall, and the lateness of the hour, he knew that the sisters had returned, and *she* was once more under the same roof with him ; but one day a sharp pang was given him by Miss Jermyn, and it came to pass thus.

‘ It is so funny,’ began Dolly one day at dessert, as she was toying over some grapes with her child-like fingers ; ‘ but papa says we shall all have to change our names to Douglas—not I, for one,’ she added, with a smiling glance at Vincent Sheldon, ‘ but you, Kate and Violet—Violet Douglas !’

Violet coloured painfully as the heedless girl spoke ; Kate saw this, and coloured too, but with supreme vexation, as she saw that Douglas grew very pale, and his under-lip quivered. Intent on a glass of full-bodied old port, Sir Jahleel saw nothing, but Miss Jermyn thought,

‘ “ Hereby hangs a tale.” Why does not papa get rid of this person ?’

In the drawing-room that evening, when Violet was at the piano, and Dolly and Sheldon, with their heads very close together, were, or affected to be, very intent on an album of

photos they had seen a hundred times, with great tact she drew Douglas into a corner, and with a smile unusually sweet for her, said,

‘Are you to accompany papa’ (she did not say *us*) ‘to Barons Hall when we go there, as the season is so nearly over?’

‘I do not know; but why, Miss Jermyn?’ asked Douglas, surprised that she should take any interest in *his* movements in any way.

‘Because it is so probable that we shall have a marriage in the family about that time, and we shall all be so busy. How your poor pen *will* have to work, Mr. Douglas!’

‘A marriage—Miss Adolphine, I suppose, and Mr. Sheldon?’ he remarked, glancing at the absorbed young couple.

‘Is she the only marriageable girl in the family?’ asked Miss Jermyn, sharply opening and shutting her fan.

‘I beg pardon, but I thought——’

‘I referred to Violet, Mr. Douglas,’ she interrupted, with a casual yet piercing glance.

‘With whom?’

‘Cannot you guess?’ she asked sweetly now. ‘It will be a grand affair. We shall have a ball at Barons Hall, and of course the officers of *his* regiment will give us a return one in the pavilion. They are a hospitable corps—keep open house in their own luncheon tent at Ascot, Goodwood, and Epsom, and all that sort of thing.’

Douglas heard as if assenting, and with a smile and a sickness, a sinking in his heart. He did not care to ask *who* the bridegroom would be. Miss Jermyn saw the omission, and knowing thereby that her shaft had told, proceeded at once to talk of something else. She had mentioned no names, and thus had not fully committed herself.

Was this unwonted confidence—most unwonted indeed in her—dictated by family considerations, prudence and caution—by good feeling to himself, by spite or jealousy?

He would not determine; but the communication made

him avoid the society of Violet more than he had hitherto done, and roused again the bitter conviction that he should take his leave of the house for ever ; but he seemed chained to the spot, and when Sir Harry took his departure for Brighton it seemed to Douglas that his name was seldom mentioned.

But on more than one occasion after this Miss Jermyn waxed quite eloquent in the hearing of Douglas on the disadvantages of *mésalliances*, and the rigid necessity for maintaining a proper distinction of classes.

And so he lingered on ; and each day that he saw and talked with Violet there was something new and fresh to discover in her, and she grew the more interesting to Douglas, because he had not read her character at once—frank, true, steadfast and earnest, there was not an iota of the coquette in her. So he dreamed on, for in defiance of the difference—the formidable barrier that money, and the position given by money—raised between them, it was impossible for Douglas—young, imaginative, and enthusiastic—not to indulge in fond and passionate daydreams, as he watched Violet Jermyn, her soft brown tresses, her snowy neck, white-lidded eyes of darkest blue, with lashes long and thick, her dark straight eyebrows that lent such character to her face—Violet, so sweetly gentle and winning in voice and manner—to him perfection—the genuine type of all an English girl should be !

How he envied Vincent Sheldon and joyous Dolly in the happy security of their love—affianced openly, and only waiting a stipulated time to be made more happy still : and to whom the path of love was smooth as a mirror—level as a railway.

‘Fire must consume—life must have something to feed on !’ Douglas would think ; ‘but what have I done that the path of life and love should be made so mortifying—so hard and thorny to me ?’

It has been said that if we would be strong we must bear in silence, for thereby we not only become strong, but likewise test our strength. Whether this axiom applies to love matters

we pretend not to say—we rather doubt it. ‘Love is not always born of hope,’ it has been written; ‘for there is a love so pure that it can live on its own flame and wish for no more; but this is the love before the fall;’ and, sentiment apart, that of our hero for Violet was, of course, a little more emotional. Amid onlookers Douglas, of course, subdued all outward sign of his affection, though we doubt not that Violet had a good intuitive knowledge of its existence; but he could not, without a bitter pang, hear her soft voice and look upon her sweet face, and then think how near, and yet so far away from him, was the only creature he had learned to love.

However, a crisis was at hand in this affair. Like proposals, we suppose that no two declarations of love ever came about in precisely the same way, though they generally have the same result in the end—or are hoped to have.

Left in the library one day by Sir Jahleel to finish a pressing letter to Mr. John Charters, Douglas sat sunk in thought, with a strange and saturnine smile on his dark face, his cheek resting on his clenched hand, an elbow on the writing-table, and his eyes fixed on vacancy to all appearance, when Violet, who had declined to join her sisters for a drive, came suddenly in to find some book she wanted; but on seeing Douglas she quickly paused, and then he rose from his chair.

‘Good-morning, Miss Violet. I have not seen you before to-day,’ said he.

‘We were late at the ball last night—early rather, for the sun was up when we came home—so Dolly and I breakfasted in our own room,’ she replied, with a smile that was somewhat shy, for not expecting to find Douglas there, she felt that her entrance produced a situation; yet she frankly held out to him a little white hand, the touch of which was in itself great happiness. ‘I wanted a volume of Byron; but you—were you building a castle in Spain, that you were so lost in reverie?’

‘Perhaps; I often indulge in such a dream, but it is chiefly in rebuilding a castle elsewhere.’

'A curious idea !'

'I fear that such castle-building is too often allied with poverty and misfortune ; but my misfortune has been the means of my greatest happiness and greatest misery,' he added, as he felt his heart rushing to his head while gazing on her.

'Mr. Douglas, what paradox is this?' she asked, as her white lids drooped.

'My introduction to you,' he replied in a low voice, the tone of which there was no mistaking. Her right hand was resting—unconsciously to herself apparently—on the back of the chair from which he had just risen ; he placed his own tenderly, caressingly upon it, and as she did not withdraw it, with confidence and confusion strangely mixed, he said : 'How often have I longed, Miss Violet, for some one to give a purpose to my purposeless life, and to encourage me to attempt—to essay something good, or great, or grand.'

'Well?' said she, in a breathless voice.

'I have never known that there was one who could inspire me with the resolution to attempt this till I met you—till I knew you, and learned—as you know I do—to love you !'

His lips were close to her own now, and his clasp had tightened on her captive hand. Come what might of it—expulsion and sorrow—the great secret had escaped him, but less coherently, perhaps, than we have recorded it.

'Oh, Mr. Douglas !' murmured the girl in a whisper, as confusion at this abruptness overwhelmed her. She glanced hastily round in dread of watchful eyes or listening ears—her first thought being of her sister Katharine ; she trembled, changed colour many times, and her soft heart heaved with every respiration. The situation was novel—strange to her—delicious, yet alarming.

There was a pause, during which he possessed himself of both her hands, and she stood before him with downcast eyes and half-averted face, showing principally the close white division of her silky and beautiful brown hair ; and now Douglas's

dark eyes were full of light and exceeding tenderness, and his voice was low and pathetic, as he said :

‘Oh, Violet, he who loves you is lost or won for life—he will never love another—to him you will be unlike all other women in the world—and such you are to me. Do you pardon me for telling you this ?’

‘Yes,’ she replied in a whisper, but scarcely knowing what she said.

‘Dearest Violet, I love you—love you with the first love of a heart that never knew another passion,’ said he, with ardour and a broken voice, as he tenderly pressed his lips to the white parting of her hair. ‘My eyes—my manner have told you this already, Violet.’

There was a pause, during which she softly returned the pressure of his hands, a silent assent or accordance that sent a thrill to his heart.

‘Then you do not—oh, how dare I ask you?—you do not love Sir Harry or anyone else ?’

‘No—oh no !’

‘But he loves you ?’

‘He admires me, I know,’ she replied, looking up with a shy smile, and with a little return of confidence.

‘Who do not, that see and know you ? But your sister, Miss Jermyn, gave me to understand that a marriage was on the *tapis*.’

‘With him ?’

‘Yes.’

‘He has not yet asked me.’

‘If he did ? But—but why did she say so ?’

Violet’s eyes drooped again, and she did not reply.

‘Why ?’ he urged, caressing her still captive hands.

‘To prevent—to preclude that which you have told me—told me just now. You don’t know Kate as I do.’

‘How cruel of her ; yet perhaps there was wisdom in seeking to crush the hope that began to bud in the heart of one so poor—so very poor as I am.’

Panting now, she tried to release herself, but he still retained her hands, a delicious thrill of happiness passing through the hearts—indeed, through the whole forms of both.

‘Oh, Mr. Douglas!’ she said brokenly, ‘please to—to remember——’

‘Then you do not or cannot love me?’

A sudden courage seemed to take possession of the trembling and shrinking Violet; and looking full and upward into his eyes, she said:

‘I do love you, *Sholto*, dearly, very dearly; and you know I do.’

‘Violet, dearest, dearest Violet!’

One long and passionate kiss—a kiss never to be forgotten by either of them—and she fled from him.

That kiss sealed all between them. It was a bond, a tie, an unseen link that left no mark, and yet was strong as steel!

For hours after this each remained lost in happy reverie, acting over and over again in fancy that sudden *dénouement* in the library, with all its delicious and—as the prosaic may deem them—fatuous features.

How strange it seemed to Violet that she was now mistress of a secret to be kept even from dear Dolly, from whom she never had a secret in all her innocent life before; and that every wish and hope of her future was to centre in this young man—this Sholto Douglas—of whose name and existence she had been ignorant but a few weeks before!

A great and sudden—a most momentous change had come into the lives of both; they were the same, and yet seemed somehow to be scarcely the same persons they were yesterday.

We need not dwell upon the days that followed the revelation of their mutual secret. Though doomed to cherish and nourish it in secret, they were days purely happy and ineffably bright to Douglas and Violet, to whom the former became her life, her soul, her all—as Romeo to Juliet—the god of her ‘idolatry.’

But did either consider the end ?

Love had been given and returned, vows interchanged in the usual fashion and fervour, old as Time ; but, as yet, no word, perhaps no thought, of marriage or the future had occurred between these two. But each was simply happy in the assurance of the other's love and faith.

So what was to be the next move ? Was Douglas to ask the ambitious Sir Jahleel for his second daughter, with her hundred thousand pounds and more, or wait ? Wait for *what ?* the heart of Douglas sometimes asked—and his head, too—when thoughts of the future *did* at last begin to intrude upon him ; and the contemplation of what he had done—not to himself—but to Violet by entangling her in his own fate.

He nervously doubted whether he had acted honourably to Sir Jahleel in all this ; and he laughed a strange and bitter laugh, if we may use so peculiar a term, that might have startled, or, at least, have puzzled the gentle girl had she heard it.

‘ Darling Violet ! ’ he would think at times ; ‘ she loves me—loves me for myself alone. God bless her for it ! Knowing scarcely who I am, who I have been, and what I may yet become ! ’

He gave Violet a ring, which she treasured in secret, and could only view upon occasions, though it was the pledge, the emblem of so much between them. It had a ruby heart surmounted by a crown of diamonds, with the mottoes engraved inside the hoop—*Lock Sicker* and *Forget Me Not*.

‘ It was my mother's engagement ring, and never till the hour of death left her hand,’ said Douglas.

‘ I shall prize it, as you know, Sholto ; but is it ominous of good fortune to wear a dead woman's engagement ring ? ’ asked Violet, a little gravely.

‘ Surely the days for such superstitions are past,’ said he, smiling fondly on her, as he placed it on the third finger of her left hand.

'And *Lock Sicker*. What does that mean?'

'It is a Douglas motto, old as the hills, and means *Be Sure*.'

So all his resolutions to 'tear himself away' had only come to this!

Could Sir Jahleel have suspected his paid dependent of such presumption as all this, he would soon have given him marching orders; but Sir Jahleel, as we have said, had soon some matters, even more peculiarly and entirely his own, to take into his most earnest and serious consideration.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SKELETON IN GRESHAM STREET.

IN all the length of that busy thoroughfare, which, as all the world knows, or ought to know, runs from St. Martin's to Old Jewry, and which takes its name from those famous City Greshams, one of whom was Mayor in 1537, and whose father founded the Royal Exchange, and another of whom was famous when Henry VIII. was acting his part of royal Blue-beard—in all its length, we say, there were no better-known offices than those of Selby & Jermyn, merchants and bankers, though the first name in the firm was, as stated, a myth, the sole surviving partner being the wealthy Sir Jahleel Jermyn, knight, of Barons Hall, Sussex, etc., etc.

Though the latter had a highly-salaried and most efficient manager, he was wont, more from old force of habit than from necessity, to go always daily, at some time, to his old office in Gresham Street, and take his seat at the same old table, in the same scantily-lighted room, in which he had toiled for so many years.

Day by day, in one dull, even, and unchanging round, work

had proceeded in these offices ; generations—a succession, at least—of clerks, seemed to have come and gone ; some got grey in the service of the firm—the manager particularly so ; but nothing had ever occurred to cause the least excitement since old Mr. Selby's death, or to warp the current of steady money-making, till one morning, some weeks after our story opened, it was found that these most respectable City premises had been entered overnight ; that the safes had all been tried, but only one, in Sir Jahleel's room, had yielded to the leverage of a 'jemmy,' or some instrument, and certain documents had been taken therefrom—particularly *one* on which he set great store ; though what it was, or what its nature, he would not distinctly say, even to the police, of whose presence and persistent inquiries he seemed only too thankful to be rid.

If money was the object of the thief or thieves, and who could doubt that it was ? none had been taken. The safe was repaired, strengthened anew, and after a day or two matters settled down to their usual quietude in the Gresham Street office ; and one afternoon, when some of the clerks were gone, and two others, dapper little fellows named Quills and Penfold, were on the eve of departing, Sir Jahleel arrived, with a somewhat ruffled aspect, and as he passed to his room asked if any one was awaiting him, as he evidently expected a visitor.

'A man has been here twice to-day asking for you, sir,' said Mr. Quills from behind a huge ledger, the pages of which he was enabled to reach by a lofty stool.

'Mr. Joab Scrowle, he called himself, sir,' added Mr. Penfold.

'Did he say what his business was ?' asked Sir Jahleel, whose face darkened as he spoke.

'Only that it was with you, sir, and very particular, and that he would call again at this hour. He was a caddish-looking fellow, and I should think came on some begging errand,' said Quills, laughing.

'Why should you have any thought on the matter ?' asked

Sir Jahleel sternly. Mr. Quills collapsed at once ; but lingering at the door of his inner room, the merchant glanced nervously back at the two lads. They bent their heads suspiciously low, and wrote away, to all appearance, intensely in their ledgers, but at some irrepressible thoughts of their own—some little private joke—their lips were quivering with suppressed amusement. This Sir Jahleel cut short, by saying :

‘Mr. Quills and Mr. Penfold, you may go ; I shall see this person myself if he comes. The porter will shut up the office, and I shall thank you to suppress unseemly merriment in business hours.’

‘We are not laughing, sir,’ urged Penfold very gently.

‘You are giggling at something ; go, and remember that people of your class are plentiful enough in London,’ he added in a louder tone of voice.

The books were shut ; desks closed, office coats doffed for others ; the gas turned down, the premises left to the porter, and the young men hurried away.

‘What is up with the governor?’ said one.

‘He must have got out of bed on what is generally known as the wrong side ; he is as cross as two sticks or a bag of nails,’ replied the other, laughing, for they were used to be bullied by him when in a bad humour ; but they knew not that their purse-proud employer’s turn came quickly when the porter of the establishment announced :

‘Mr. Joab Scrowle, Sir Jahleel.’

There was ushered in a mean-looking little man, apparently nearer fifty than forty years of age, dressed in a tight thread-bare suit of no particular colour, a well-worn hat in one hand, an umbrella that had seen better days in the other, and he wore black kid gloves, every finger of which gaped at the point. His face was pale and seamed with lines, where not adorned with pimples, by the same potations that tipped with scarlet his shiny and coarse thick nose ; his forehead was narrow, his ears high and prominent, his hair unkempt and

grizzled, his eyebrows bushy, and his teeth, or what remained of them were a dark yellow.

Restless in expression, his dark-grey eyes glistened like those of a snake, and like a snake seemed to focus and fascinate Sir Jahleel, as the latter, seated in his luxurious elbow-chair, with legs stretched out at length, his hands deep down in his trousers pockets clutching gold and silver, lay back, and through the glasses, which shone like his bald head in the light of the gasolier, surveyed sternly, grimly, defiantly and fiercely, his most unwelcome visitor.

The latter placed his battered hat carefully upon Sir Jahleel's writing-table, bowed ironically, drew off his well-nigh fingerless gloves, and, seating himself, crossed his hands on the umbrella, and, after poking the merchant playfully in the ribs, said :

'By Jove, you're as difficult to get at as royalty itself. Found you out at last, though ; face to face, eh ?—glad to see me, eh ?'

Face to face again with Joab Scrowle ! Sir Jahleel felt such a chill come over him as comes over the imaginative dreamer, who, in a nightmare, finds himself face to face with a ghost. 'Most people,' says Whyte-Melville, 'are ashamed of their skeletons, hiding them away in their respective cupboards, as though the very ownership were a degradation—alluding to them, perhaps, occasionally in the domestic circle, but ignoring them utterly before the world—a world that knows about them all the while ; that has weighed their skulls, counted their ribs, and can tell the very recesses in which they are kept.'

Now, Mr. Joab Scrowle was the special skeleton of Sir Jahleel Jermyn ; but one that he *never* had alluded to in the domestic circle, where the existence of such a Frankenstein was, as yet, unknown, and he stared at him now in bitter silence.

'You are getting old now, Sir Jahleel,' said Scrowle mockingly, as he perched his chin on the top of his umbrella, which was planted between his legs. 'Do you not remember me ? Where

the devil is your tongue? or, to speak poetically, is your sight failing with the shades of departing life and the coming night? But you expected me of course,, as I wrote to your place in Belgravia. Dear, dear, how this room reminds me of old Selby. There he used to sit, in that very chair, just opposite you, when you were young—a junior partner, and he was waxing old.'

Joab Scrowle smiled on seeing how Sir Jahleel writhed at the name of his late partner, and smiled still more when he attempted to bluster.

'Be off, sir!' exclaimed the City knight; 'be off, sir, I say, or I'll give you in charge of the police for the late outrage committed on these premises. Am I to be hunted, fleeced, and swindled by a thief and beggar like you?'

'In the first place, you will not give me in charge of the police; you know a trick worth two of that,' replied the other, with a sneering and defiant smile; 'and in the second place, you will be hunted by me, as you call it, perhaps to the end of your days. The bit of blue paper, to which some twenty years ago I forged your name, and which came, how I never precisely knew, into your possession—that apparently fatal document, my first essay in the money market, which gave you a power over me, and made me the passive tool of your own nefarious plans—no longer exists, as you know it was abstracted from that very safe and committed to the flames a few nights ago, you no doubt know by whom?'

'Begone, you scoundrel!'

'The scoundrel is now free, and by that act is beyond your power, Sir Jahleel Jermyn. It was by the power it gave you over me that twenty years ago I did your dirty work—lucrative work, however, it was to me, still more to you—when I spirited away from Hampstead little Piercy, the son of your partner, Selby, and under his father's will enabled you, as survivor of the firm, to fall heir to all that should have been the lad's on his attaining manhood.'

'Liar!' hissed Sir Jahleel through his teeth. 'You never could produce the boy again, though you often threatened to do so. He was drowned, and his hat was found in a pond at Hampstead.'

'Where it was cast by me to blind such fools as you. Bad though I was, I had not the heart to destroy the child, but took him with me in the ship in which I sailed as supercargo. We touched at Rotterdam, and there I contrived to lose him. But I tell you, for all that, he is *not* dead. I have seen him but yesterday. He is in London, and I can produce him at any time—the rightful, lawful, and undoubted heir of old Piercy Selby—to expose you, and claim half of your fortune, more perhaps, and make you an outcast, or the felon you so often threatened to make me.'

'I do not believe all this,' said Sir Jahleel, after a pause; his voice was hoarse, and he was now as white as a sheet. 'And in your insolence, your spirit of bravado, you have done what you never dared to do before, entered my house and actually presented yourself, when I believe the worse for liquor, before my private secretary.'

'Much daring there is in that!' said Scrowle, laughing; and then he added, laughing more loudly, 'your private secretary—*your* secretary. Mr. Douglas—oh, my eyes! hold my sides, or I shall burst!'

'Douglas. You know his name, then?'

'Right well, and he and I shall be better acquainted yet than we are. I know that he is one of the right sort—a thorough good chap, all round! And by chance I saw your youngest daughter, a fine girl—a regular stunner!' he continued, rolling his eyes about. 'By Jove! old Jahleel, she is well worth——'

'Worth what?'

'Winning—that is all.'

'Mocking villain! Three times have I bought your silence at the expense of vast sums——'

'The sums must be vaster now, I can tell you. There is no

longer the forged bill to be flaunted before me, or held over me, like a hangman's noose.'

'The last sum—a thousand—was to take you to America.'

'So it did, many thanks; but there it melted like snow in the sun, and I took a longing to see you again, for the sake of Selby and the old times.'

'And where is this so-called son of his?' asked Sir Jahleel, in a low voice of concentrated wrath; 'and under what name does he go?'

'Both are my secrets, and not to be sold—as yet. But enough of palaver; I have come on business, old Jahleel, and I mean to have it done.'

'As for your so-called secrets, how can I believe so finished a scoundrel as you?'

'I am not so finished a scoundrel as you would have made me, and wished me to be, twenty years ago; so don't use hard names, Sir Jahleel Jermyn. A visit to Scotland Yard might prove who most merits the title you give me so freely.'

'I have no proof but your word that the boy you refer to ever attained to manhood, and is now alive,' said Sir Jahleel, with a groan, as he thought of his three daughters, and felt how this man held him in his power. 'Joab Scrowle, what will satisfy you? Name any sum that is not too extortionate—come near me no more, and spare me torture such as this. Gull says I have disease of the heart. If so, this sort of thing is enough to kill me.'

'Disease of the heart, eh! Didn't think you'd such an article in your anatomy,' sneered Scrowle; 'but if it makes you hop your twig when I'm in town, I'll come and see you comfortably tucked in at Kensal, or wherever it may be.'

A sigh, ending in a groan, escaped Sir Jahleel, and Scrowle's snake-like eyes actually sparkled in the intensity of his delight at witnessing his mental suffering.

'Aha!' he exclaimed, 'it is the likes of me that knows the

likes of you ; and to see you in a fix, as the Yankees say, is enough to make a cast-iron dog laugh.'

'Name a sum.'

'My habits are expensive generally, and as your conscience—your good name, rather—is a safe bank to draw on——'

'My God !' exclaimed Sir Jahleel, on whose narrow brow the bead drops of perspiration glittered, 'when is all this to end?'

'Oho ! you never had much religion about you except one.'

'One, fellow !' said the merchant, confronting his torturer ; 'and what was that?'

'A devilish good one—the religion of getting on. You believed in *that*, if you did in nothing else.'

'I ask you once again,' said Sir Jahleel, with stern gravity of manner, 'to say, as you shall have Heaven to answer, does Piercy Selby live?'

'Live ! Of course he does, and is sounder in wind and limb than either you or I.'

'And you can produce him?'

'Would you like me to do so? I don't think that move would suit your book precisely. My eye, what an exposure there would be. How society would have its fling. How well it would look in the flaming posters of the newspapers that the famous Sir Jahleel Jermyn, of Gresham Street, of Belgravia, and of Barons Hall, Sussex, claimant for the Scottish peerage of Torthorwald—you see I know *that* too—has been committed to Newgate for abduction and felony !'

And Scrowle uttered a hideous roar of laughter, and brandished his umbrella in his gust of merriment.

Sir Jahleel grew pale with desperation, and cautiously opening the door of the outer office, looked round to see that no one, even the porter, was lingering there. The apartment was empty—consigned to silence and darkness.

'Apart from producing him bodily, what proofs can you show me that he does live?'

'Do you think I am so jolly green as to carry *them* about with me? They are too important to us both, and too particularly valuable to me, to be carried about in a pocket-book. I have them at home.'

'And where is your home?'

'Excuse me telling you, Sir Jahleel, though neither of us *yet* is under police supervision. But we are wasting time. Out with your cheque-book, old fellow; but, remember, *three* figures won't do this time; you must again make them *four*.'

'I cannot do it,' groaned Sir Jahleel.

'Rot! I say it is all gammon and rot to tell me this.'

'Swear by all you may hold sacred that you will come near me no more if I fill up this cheque for £1,000,' said Sir Jahleel, drawing his cheque-book from his drawer.

'Give me £1,500, and I'll swear anything you like. And it must be an open cheque, remember, and no tricks upon travellers.'

Tremulously Sir Jahleel's hand filled up the document, and marked the counterfoil, by force of habit, perhaps, and he handed the slip to Scrowle, who narrowly scrutinised the signature, made a profusion of ironical bows, and placed it in a much-worn pocket-book. He then carefully put on his almost fingerless black gloves; slowly brushed with his sleeve the nap of his broken hat; put his umbrella under his arm, and airily bowed himself out, saying:

'Adieu, Sir Jahleel.'

'Good night,' was the short and stern response.

'Not good night, my friend—not good night, but *au revoir*,' was the menacing reply, smilingly spoken, as the rascal laughed aloud and withdrew.

It is with no small regret, though necessary to the progress of our veritable story, that we have been compelled to throw this sudden and somewhat ghastly light upon the inner life of Sir Jahleel and one of the secrets of his rapid accession to wealth; and his reflections were far from enviable as he was

driven home in the handsome private brougham, which he kept for his own special use, leaving the statelier carriage almost entirely to the use of his daughters.

Conscience did whisper, Why not have Piercy Selby, if living, brought to him and restored to his just rights, even should it cost the loss of Barons Hall and half the fortune amassed in Gresham Street?

But avarice, pride, and fear crushed the generous thought in the bud, and he cast it from him, while other thoughts came thick and fast.

If Piercy Selby was actually living and had not been drowned by Scrowle (how he shuddered at the thought now), might not the latter make more by restoring him to fortune than what he extracted from him (Sir Jahleel) as silence money? If dead—or if the child had perished in any way after his alleged abandonment at Rotterdam—how could it be proved? How was he to bury this skeleton, to rid himself of this tormentor?

There were private detectives and private inquiry offices—the advertisements of such teemed in every daily paper; but he shrank from employing these disreputable agencies lest they might discover *too much*.

In many ways life had just then begun to have a peculiar sweetness for him. The labours of his early years were all past; wealth, though ill-gotten much of it was, had flowed upon him; his high position as a citizen, merchant, and banker was assured; he had a stately house in Belgravia, a noble residence in Sussex; his daughters were all he could wish them—the youngest affianced to the heir of a merchant prince; the second to wed or not, as she chose, a baronet; and the eldest, a peer for certain, if he attained, as he never doubted, the dormant peerage of Torthorwald; and yet all this might be swept away like Aladdin's palace, or destroyed like Al-naschar's basket of crystal, by the breath of Joab Scrowle!

When he thought of his brilliant and happy home circle, and

when he looked on his three innocent and beautiful daughters—the haughty Kate, the soft and graceful Violet, the gay and laughing Dolly—and thought of the shame and ruin a wretch could bring upon them all, he turned back with astonishment, compunction, horror, and remorse to the crime into which a sudden gust of avarice had lured him twenty years ago—a crime against his trusting dead partner, and that partner's helpless orphan child!

But for the terrible temptation offered by the peculiar tenour of Mr. Selby's will, this awful state of matters had never come to pass. Truly his sin was finding him out; and with all his love of life, and all the good things thereof, he felt that he would rather commit suicide than survive the disgrace of his children and the scorn of his fellow-men.

Scrowle, with all his daring and effrontery, under the knowledge that Sir Jahleel held the proofs of his act of forgery (proofs now gone), had never before ventured near his private house, and there he had been seen by Douglas.

In his own suspicious mind, Sir Jahleel began to think it strange that the latter should have become his secretary just about the time of Scrowle's reappearance. Were they in correspondence? Scrowle seemed to speak curiously and approvingly of Douglas. Why was the latter so studiously impenetrable as to his antecedents? Could *he* be the lost heir to whom the scoundrel alluded; but if so, how came he to be so specially and warmly recommended by Mr. John Charters, a man of unimpeachable character?

If it were otherwise, Douglas was playing some game very closely.

In a chaos of surprise and alarm, uncertainty and exasperation, the luckless Sir Jahleel knew not what to think, or of whom to be suspicious now, while the parting words of the odious Joab Scrowle too surely gave him to understand that he had not seen or heard the last of the lost heir.

CHAPTER IX.

FRESH CAUSES FOR SURMISE.

A LITTLE time passed on ; Sir Jahleel saw and heard no more of Joab Scrowle, and in the hope that this worthy had drunk himself to death, or disappeared for ever, he began again to breathe more freely.

Did young Piercy Selby, if really alive and in London, as Scrowle had so confidently stated, know *who* he was, and what his own claims were ? This seemed barely possible, for why did he not advance them, were the ever-recurring thoughts of Sir Jahleel—the first to occur to him in the morning, the last to haunt him at night, and even to take terrifying coherency in his dreams.

Connecting at times—as we have said—Douglas, or as he mentally called him, ‘the so-named Douglas’—with Scrowle’s visits and threats, though there was as yet no solid reason why he should do so, the luckless Sir Jahleel, who was very ingenious in the process of self-torment, longed to dismiss him from his employment, though he found him invaluable in the matter of foreign correspondence, and most necessary to him, but feared to precipitate matters by doing so.

To add to his perplexity and cause for surmise, he discovered that Douglas was in frequent correspondence with old John Charters too—more than mere friendship or patronage would seem to warrant or necessitate. This he did not feel himself entitled either to comment upon or inquire about ; but what did it all mean ?

He and Miss Jermyn, whom he had set to work, had only been able to extract, and with much art and difficulty, from Douglas, that he had been, by force of circumstances, a wanderer and a cosmopolitan, making his home in many places, and to Sir Jahleel this proved unsatisfactory, and thus little

episodes that occurred about this time added to his doubts and fears—and even puzzled the confiding Violet.

Douglas, whose company was expected, understood, or a tolerated thing at table now, was present at a quiet little dinner party given to old Mr. Sheldon. Young Vincent was there, of course, the Rev. Octave Bede—mild and placid as ever—and a Captain Bramley, of the Hussars (a friend of Sir Harry's), who may be briefly described as a good-looking and heedless young fellow, who addicted himself with greater *impressement* than the baronet now relished, to dangling closely in attendance on Violet; but which, assured as he was of her love and strength of character, gave no uneasiness to Douglas.

Mr. Sheldon, whose sleek round face was always beaming with good nature, born of long and prosperous success in life, while sipping his first glass of port, said to Sir Jahleel—

‘I have brought you a present, my old friend.’

‘Thanks—what may it be?’

‘A little Dutch piece—a gem by Adrian van der Werf. I have desired Tapleigh, the butler, to place it in your library for the present.’

‘Adrian van der Werf! never heard of him,’ said Sir Jahleel, who, though affecting to be a connoisseur in art, in fact knew little or nothing about it; ‘but I dare say you have, Mr. Douglas?’

‘Yes, I have seen the house in which he was born.’

‘Where?’

‘In my boyhood—at Rotterdam.’

Casual though the reply and the manner thereof was, Sir Jahleel started as if a wasp had stung him; he grew pale, and let his wine glass fall.

‘Papa, dear papa, are you ill?’ exclaimed Violet, starting affectionately to his side.

‘Only a momentary giddiness, dear—return to your seat—it has passed away.’

The replies of Douglas, though true, might have been the

purest coincidence, but to Sir Jahleel's now restless and suspicious mind they seemed to dovetail most unpleasantly with the brief communications of Joab Scrowle. However, even to the keenest observer it would have been apparent that Douglas seemed utterly unconscious that his words were of the least consequence to anyone.

And now Captain Bramley, who had been observing Douglas narrowly, said—

'You and I have met on the Continent, I think?'

'Very probably; may I ask where?'

'In Vienna, at the *Chancellerie* of the Embassy.'

'Very probably,' replied Douglas again; and, to change the subject, addressed something to Vincent Sheldon.

'I think I, too, have seen you elsewhere in the Austrian capital,' said Bramley, 'at the masked ball of the *Redouten Saal*, and again at—at Monaco.'

'Excuse me, Captain Bramley,' replied Douglas quietly, yet with an air of annoyance, 'but I never attended the masked balls you refer to, and I never was at Monaco.'

And resolutely half-turning his chair, as if to end the subject, he once more addressed Vincent Sheldon, while a peculiar smile stole into the face of the Hussar officer, and he tugged the ends of his long fair moustache.

Sir Jahleel observed the questions, the answers of Douglas, and the peculiar manner of the captain.

'If,' thought he, with a passing emotion of relief, 'Douglas has been in all these places, it is extremely improbable that he can be the lost Selby; but *who* the deuce is he, and what has he been? Let me but secure this Torthorwald peerage and I shall then feel myself far above all petty fears and troubles!'

'Who is that handsome fellow, for such he is decidedly?' said Captain Bramley, stooping his moustache close to the pretty white ear of Violet.

'He is papa's private secretary,' she replied.

'But his name?' asked the officer, almost in a whisper; 'Douglas, is it?'

'Yes,' replied Violet, colouring slightly.

'I thought so,' said the officer, and tugged anew at his moustache, as he seemed always to do when feeling perplexed or vacant; but after the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, and the City men became absorbed in the 'money article' and so forth, he turned again to Douglas, and said with some point:

'You have been in Italy?'

'Yes—more than once,' was the reply.

'And never, you say, at Monaco?'

'Never.'

'Come now,' said the officer, with a provoking smile, 'think again. Don't you know the Board of Green Cloth there—the famous gaming table, where you won a thousand napoleons from me, at *Trente-et-quarante*, the most aristocratic game there, and always played for in gold.'

'Excuse me, Captain Bramley, but I tell you, on my honour, that I never was at Monaco in my life. Moreover, I never play, as I never could afford to lose.'

'But one may play to win.'

The face of Douglas grew dark, and the knit in his forehead—a knit that instantly caught the captain's eye—deepened with genuine indignation, tinged with an expression of distress.

'The likeness is wonderful,' continued Bramley bluntly.

'It must have been either you or the devil.'

'May I inquire your meaning?' asked Douglas haughtily.

'You and he are so marvellously alike in every detail.'

'Of dress?'

'No; of face and figure.'

'Can it be—can it be?' Sir Jahleel heard Douglas mutter to himself, and then pause, while the angry expression left his face, but one of distress remained.

'This is strange,' said Vincent Sheldon, 'for Sir Harry

Honeywood declared that he met you in Brighton at a time when we all knew you were here.'

'Have you what the Germans call a double-ganger?' asked the captain, laughing.

'It would almost seem so,' replied Douglas, adopting his tone; 'but such mistakes are sufficiently annoying!'

Bramley looked dissatisfied, but did not pursue the subject; he twirled his fair moustache, and looked at Douglas a little superciliously. The latter returned his glance very steadily, if not defiantly; yet even to Vincent Sheldon, with whom he was a firm favourite, it was evident that he seemed disturbed, and his sombre face only brightened a little when they joined the ladies in the drawing-room, where a few other guests—with whom the Jermyns did not stand on much ceremony—had come, and as the company was broken into groups and couples, he felt himself at liberty to join Violet for a little time, and they could converse under the pretence of looking over a large volume of engravings.

'I watched you as you came into the room,' said Violet, 'and wondered why you looked so *triste*, Sholto—so unhappy, indeed. Has anything occurred—has anything saddened you?'

He remained silent.

'Sholto,' said the sweet, persuasive voice again, 'speak before that tiresome Bramley comes near us; can I do aught for you? Why is all the brightness gone out of your face? Won't you tell me?'

'I cannot tell you yet—some time I may; I have griefs that are peculiarly my own, dear Violet,' said he softly in her ear, while affecting to admire one of the engravings and turning it over.

'But surely you will let me share them with you?'

'Another time—but not now—here we converse under difficulties, and are liable to incessant interruption.'

She glanced hastily about, and saw that in the corner of the

inner drawing-room, where he stooped over her, they were left to themselves at that time, and almost alone.

'Our love seems to be getting quite like a novel,' she said, in a soft, cooing voice, while glancing up at him shyly and lovingly; 'and a very interesting novel, too—if I could only see the last page of it.'

'You talk laughingly, dearest Violet, of the very anxiety that is torture to me. I feel, Violet, that I owe you profound gratitude for loving me so much—so much, my dear one, as I know you do, when I have such poor prospects before me, and you have those that abound in wealth—it may be also rank.'

Low as his voice was, it broke as he said this.

'Yet, after all, Sholto—how I do love to call you by your dear, funny name—why should wealth or rank influence me? To papa they are, I know, all; to me they are nothing.'

'My darling, you seem so generous—I so selfish,' he whispered; for when Douglas thought of his slender monetary affairs, and of her great portion, his proud soul died within him with shame and mortification.

His heart was full of tenderness as he gazed down on her and observed the contour of the beautiful head; the sheeny hair, where the light struck it; the delicate white ears, and the pure whiteness of her adorable neck—the tenderness from which, at such times, poetry almost divine might be produced, could a man's glowing thoughts be put in speech and writing. To Violet the present and new state of affairs seemed as yet only a delicious idyll—the realisation of a young girl's dream of loving and being beloved by a handsome young man, around whom some misfortune had cast a halo of mysterious interest; no thought of the future marred the sweetness of the present; but Douglas had often thought, as he was thinking then, how was all this to end practically between him and Violet Jermyn? Had she not the large portion her father would bestow upon her, she might be more easily claimed and won by him. He felt himself poor—a man, proud, yet dependent. She was so

rich, and her father had such aspirations for the future—aspirations compared with which the hopes he had of fortune, even of a moderate competence, made him feel as an adventurer, to be dismissed for his presumption.

‘To hope is to live,’ he thought ; and yet how little of that had he ! But to despair is to die. Probably no two of us feel alike, in being dependent on the force of existence—on the power of looking forward or onward, and however ill-defined and imperfect in itself, this consciousness of the future implies and *is* hope.

To what end did Sholto Douglas look forward ?
Time will show.

But now Captain Bramley came mincingly forward, and in his most dulcet tones begged Violet to favour him with a little music, and proffering his arm, led her to the piano, leaving Douglas to study the portfolio of engravings or follow her. A glance from Violet decided him on doing the latter, and so ended one of many such stolen and disjointed conversations.

CHAPTER X.

KATHARINE FIRES A TRAIN.

VIOLET seated herself at once at the instrument, which was open, and Douglas, by previous knowledge or force of habit, at once laid before her some selected pieces of her favourite music.

‘Do you sing, Captain Bramley ?’ she asked.

‘No—only, at least, such songs as suit a smoking-room,’ he replied.

‘Perhaps you play, then ?’

‘Not a note.’

‘What a pity. Mr. Douglas does both.’

‘He may readily be accomplished in more points than I,’

said the hussar, with a curious kind of smile, as if he remembered his own remarks about Monaco and the *trente-et-quarante* tables.

Douglas detected the smile, and the peculiar knit came for a moment into his dark and haughty brow ; and so while Bramley stood by to turn the leaves, and made many mistakes in doing so, being always too soon or too late—mistakes that made him tug his tawny moustache more viciously than ever—Violet and Douglas had the music all to themselves, and played and sang alternately, and together in the end, her soft soprano and his finely cultivated tenor voice giving each other peculiar delight as they blended or responded in duet.

Then she played the accompaniment, while he, with remarkable sweetness, sang the softest of Schumann's songs, 'The Lotus Flower,' and Bramley drew a little superciliously and a trifle sulkily aloof, while saying to Vincent Sheldon in *sotto voce*—

'By Jove, our friend Douglas seems to be making his innings here.'

Sheldon made no reply to the blunt remark, which, however, reached the quick ear of Katharine Jermyn.

'Papa,' she whispered to Sir Jahleel, behind a rich mother-of-pearl fan, 'I fear that if Captain Bramley conveys to Sir Harry a highly-coloured report of how this Mr. Douglas of yours hovers about Violet, on a perfect spirit of equality to all appearance, and accompanies her thus in music, much mischief may be done. Don't you think so? I fear matters have gone too far already!'

Without waiting for a reply, she repaired at once to the side of the musicians, and by a little manœuvring, which both Douglas and Violet easily saw through, she prevailed upon the Reverend Octave Bede to take the place of the former at the piano ; but her remark had not been lost on Sir Jahleel, and with the suspicion it excited, it opened up to him a new and unthought-of train of ideas.

Sir Jahleel knit his brows, and took in the whole of the recent situation, and recalled several that had preceded it. Hitherto he had thought nothing of the fashionable curate idling with Dolly, who was, he knew, engaged; while Violet was at the piano latterly, not playing, but actually turning over the leaves for Douglas, who performed 'divinely,' as some of the ladies alleged, a 'sleepy piece' (Sir Jahleel thought) of Schumann's, while he sang with a voice that all were compelled to admit was a fine one.

'But now,' he began to think, 'this sort of thing won't do, and may be carried too far.'

His gold glasses were perched on the point of his short nose, and he had been eyeing the pair over and through them. He lay back in his chair, with his legs stretched out, his hands, as usual, deep down in his trouser pockets, playing lovingly with the loose coin therein—the gold in the right, the silver in the left—and a sudden frown deepened on his narrow but rather receding forehead.

That his plans and hopes with regard to Violet might be marred—even quite frustrated, by a silly flirtation—he never dreamed it would be more—and by the presence or interference of this provoking secretary, was altogether beyond his contemplation. The matter might speedily be ended by his dismissal of the latter; but the thought of Scrowle, and Douglas's own admission, that he had been at 'Rotterdam in his youth,' recalled his fears and suspicions in gigantic form, and for a time his blood ran cold with baffled rage and fear.

Even a flirtation in the mildest form was an event altogether unforeseen by Sir Jahleel. That his secretary might fall in love with one of his daughters, and worship that one at a distance, as he was vaguely aware the Reverend Octave Bede did Katharine, was of course possible; but that Violet should respond, as her eldest sister's words seemed to infer, was as much out of the category of his ideas as the earth falling in love with the moon!

'D——n it!' growled in thought the City knight, 'I agree with Kate. This fellow has become too much a part and parcel of my household; but what is to be done? Save for the use I hope to make of him, together with Charters, from his Scottish historical knowledge and so forth, in the affair of my peerage, and the dread I have of Scrowle, I would dismiss him at once and mar his philandering. But if a Scotsman and a Douglas by name—how about Rotterdam and Scrowle?' added Sir Jahleel with more deeply-knitted brows, and in sore perplexity; and the real or fancied resemblance of Douglas to young Selby came again to his memory.

When we fear anyone, the next emotion is too probably to hate them cordially; and we rather think that Sir Jahleel began to view Scrowle and his secretary through the same medium.

One move he would certainly make, until he could see his way more clearly. He would transfer his household to Barons Hall, which was within an easy distance of Brighton, leaving his secretary in London, and this intention he announced as soon as the latter had retired to his own rooms and their guests had departed at night.

'To Brighton—already, papa?' said Violet, as she nestled herself on a velvet tabourette at his knee.

'Sir Harry Honeywood will be always there now,' he replied, passing a hand caressingly over her beautiful dark brown hair, while Kate stood near the fireplace, which was filled with rich and costly flowers, and fanned herself leisurely and smilingly, as she thought of the train she had fired. 'Yes, Sir Harry will be pretty constantly there,' he resumed; 'at least while the Hussars occupy the barracks on the Lewes road; and Captain Bramley mentioned to-night that he is about to give up his rooms in town, Violet.'

'Sir Harry Honeywood's movements are nothing to me,' observed Violet, with a tone of petulance unusual to her.

'Since when did this indifference come?' said Sir Jahleel, looking very grave indeed; 'well, we shall see.'

‘What, papa?’

‘What we shall see.’

‘Now, don’t deal in enigmas, please, papa; I never care to unravel them.’

‘You know that Sir Harry has admired you ever since he was introduced to you.’

‘He admires Kate quite as much, or rather more.’

‘I do not agree with you; and, what is more, I do not fancy your singing, playing, and so forth, so much with this Mr. Douglas—there is no enigma in that!’

Violet blushed painfully at this blunt speech and all it involved; even her delicate neck became suffused. But she was equal to the occasion, and rising from her recumbent position said, while Katharine’s sullen under-lip pouted at her words:

‘I am sorry to annoy you, papa, but please not to mention the names of Sir Harry and Mr. Douglas in this peculiar way to me again.’

‘Indeed. Do you know what you may be throwing away?’

‘Not quite,’ was the careless reply.

‘If the love of Sir Harry——’ began Katharine impetuously.

‘Well, even if it were bestowed upon me, am I bound to give him mine in return?’

‘Who talks of love?’ asked Sir Jahleel angrily; ‘it is your hand I wish you to give him.’

‘He has not yet asked for it.’

‘Nor is likely to do so, unless you comport yourself differently. Your conduct is a mistake, and we all make mistakes in life, unless guided by the experience of others—our seniors especially. Now this Mr. Douglas——’

Sir Jahleel paused in whatever he was about to say, as he was acute enough to see that at the very mention of his name Violet changed colour, and that her long eyelashes quivered.

‘Listen to me, girl,’ said he gravely—almost sternly; ‘has he ever ventured to address you in other language than becomes

a mere acquaintance, which he *is*, or a dependent on my bounty, which he also is? Speak, Violet—you understand me, of course ?

All his daughters stood somewhat in awe of Sir Jahleel, who could be hard and harsh at times ; Violet's extreme gentleness made her dread his anger more than the other two, and her naturally candid character made her shrink from deliberate duplicity ; so, on being questioned thus categorically, she trembled, grew pale, and her soft eyes filled with tears, as she said, ' Oh, papa, don't distress me by questions such as these !

' Of course, Violet, I am sure he has not dared to do so ; but, like Kate, I don't like to see him hanging so much about you.'

' And now good-night, papa,' kissing him in childlike manner, she cut short the conversation by tripping off to her room.

' You are right, Kate,' said Sir Jahleel, with knitted brow and an angry gleam in his somewhat shifty eyes ; ' Barons Hall be it, and forthwith.'

Yet he could scarcely conceive it possible that a daughter of his would be such a romantic fool as to ignore the attentions of such a man as Sir Harry Honeywood, and occupy her time with this 'mere beggar,' however well-bred he might be.

He felt that if it were so, one of his pet schemes might be baffled, that he had perhaps not approached the subject so quietly and artfully as he should have done, for his natural disposition, though he quailed beneath the tongue and eye of Joab Scrowle, was rather a bullying and dictatorial one.

Love he considered a weakness or a folly ; if, perhaps, he considered it at all—an infatuation of which he, certainly, had been guiltless all his life, even when he married the mother of his girls, which he did solely to put her money 'into the business' in Gresham Street.

Violet, as she laid her soft cheek on her laced pillow, wept with vexation as she thought over what her father had said before her sisters—his first remonstrance with her on a tender and painful, yet pleasant subject.

'He may think me spoiled and a disobedient girl,' she murmured, 'but I have ever been a very loving one to him ; never adopting the monitress like Kate, nor childishly absorbed in another like Dolly.'

Then she smiled lovingly, as she mentally contrasted Sir Harry Honeywood, who was certainly a fine man and courtly gentleman, but one who had pale blue eyes, a weak nether lip, and a tawny golden moustache, with the dark-eyed, dark-haired, and most striking Sholto Douglas, who was altogether of a very different type—stately, graceful, and commanding in aspect, yet so gentle and modest in demeanour. To her he seemed the realisation of those grand old Douglasses, of whom she had read in history and romance, who were ever 'tender and true,' though times there were when she thought there could be read in his face a curious kind of silent scorn of all he saw, or as if his heart was not without some untold bitterness of its own.

Alternately sweet and irritating were many of the thoughts that coursed through the busy mind of Violet as she strove to court sleep. She knew that her father, who, when he began life, thought to go through it with a pen behind his ear, valued riches more than he did the kingdom of heaven itself, and that his whole soul, since he amassed them, by the united fortunes of Selby and himself—especially since he had this new and sudden vision of the Torthorwald peerage—was full only of titles and rank ; and that, but for very shame's sake, he would seek to break the engagement of Dolly and Vincent Sheldon. So what hope could *she* have that he would view with the least patience or complacency 'her entanglement,' for such he would deem it, with the penniless and obscure Douglas ? But she addressed herself to prayer and sleep, and so, after a time, 'she let the sweetness and tender calm of nature fall upon her little troubled heart.'

Her sister Katharine's hostility to Douglas had raised a spirit of antagonism in the naturally gentle Violet, and for the first time there was a species of secret and unacknowledged gap

between them; for Katharine had studiously never lost an opportunity, and suavely, even sweetly and smilingly, had contrived to wound him day after day with subtle, unkind speeches, that stung deeply; and often Douglas thought that but for the love he bore Violet, nothing would make him endure the slights that were put upon him, and that he would turn his back upon the Jermyns for ever.

'I am so glad, papa,' said she, 'that you have at last spoken to Violet on the silly folly of her conduct.'

'Douglas I must get rid of,' he replied, as they sat together conversing far into the night. 'I am resolved that he shall not make a fool of Violet, to the injury of her prospects in life.'

But even as he spoke his eye fell on 'the gem' brought him that evening by old Mr. Sheldon—the painting by Adrian van der Werf, whose house 'in Rotterdam' Douglas had seen in *his boyhood*, and then a craven fear possessed him.

Katharine saw the direction in which his eye wandered, and, though she had not the least conception of the ideas that filled her father's mind, she remembered what had passed, and said:

'This Mr. Douglas seems to have been a very ubiquitous personage, and really these mysterious recognitions of him—such as Captain Bramley's—are becoming a little astounding—don't you think so, papa?'

'I do, Kate—I do. I don't know what to think at times. In all the years I have been in business I never was so worried and nonplussed before,' he continued, as if talking to himself rather than to her, and unconsciously she gave his secret fears a fillip by saying emphatically:

'Either your Mr. Douglas is not what he should be, or is what he should *not* be!'

'A subtle difference, Kate.'

'One thing I am resolved on, that while he is among us we shall have no more of his charades or amateur theatricals.'

'Why?'

'Why! because two of our members, Douglas and Violet, seem never tired of studying and rehearsing their parts together. But now that I think of it,' continued Kate, nursing her indignation, 'I am amazed at your weakness and vacillation, papa! Why not dismiss him at once—why delay, or seek to temporise?'

He could only think of Joab Scrowle's hints, and dared not tell her why not.

'He is a *parvenu*, papa, with all his fine airs,' said Katharine, beating the carpet with her handsome little foot; 'and it is well said that a *parvenu* who is poor and without any chance of obtaining social distinction, has no *raison d'être* at all!'

Sir Jahleel did not quite think he was what Kate so bitterly indicated, for he knew that *if* he was Selby's son he came of a good old English stock; but the phrase that he had no *raison d'être* (whatever it might mean) sounded a very clinching one.

'The fancy may be all, or chiefly, on Violet's side,' said Sir Jahleel, who was feebly inclined to temporise; 'at her age girls are impressionable, and apt to succumb to the first admirer.'

'Douglas is not the first. Violet has, and has had, many; but **he** is the first who has had such dangerous opportunities.'

'True, Kate.'

'He is perhaps as reckless as he is forward—a most ineligible and unsatisfactory *parti*, anyway; and as London is empty now, let us leave it for Barons Hall without delay, papa, though it seems outrageous that our household should be uprooted simply to checkmate *him*.'

'Agreed, Kate,' said Sir Jahleel warmly. 'Give your orders, and let us begone to-morrow, if possible.'

So, on the morrow at breakfast, Violet felt no surprise, though Douglas certainly did, when the sudden departure for Barons Hall was announced, and the latter was informed by Sir Jahleel that *he* was to remain in town.

Katharine, from behind her fan, was scrutinising the faces of the lovers closely ; but dread of her supervision made both assume a very tolerable aspect of perfect indifference, yet a cruel smile wreathed her handsome face, and made her full lip pout more than ever with satisfaction at the train she had fired so successfully.

By noon the carriage was to take the three sisters to the train for Brighton, and when Douglas rose from the table to repair to his desk and daily correspondence, he knew not when he might see Violet again, and knew that though she was only going into Sussex, the separation, so far as the chances of meeting or of correspondence went, would be, while it lasted, a perfect one, and that at Brighton, or Barons Hall, she would be completely under the influence of her own family, and any that Sir Harry Honeywood chose to exert.

He bade each of the sisters farewell in precisely the same manner ; but he felt a great throb of love in his heart, and that of Violet fluttered wildly in her soft white breast as he slightly pressed her hand ; but like Douglas, who, in his olive cheek and bright dark eye, betrayed no emotion, save in that subtlety of glance which she alone could see, she betrayed none, for the most watchful and suspicious *chaperon* could not have surpassed Katharine Jermyn in watchfulness of Violet now that she believed her eyes to be opened to the state of matters, so far as regarded this private secretary, the retention of whom by Sir Jahleel, after all she had said, surpassed her patience and her comprehension.

Yet, as the eyes of the lovers met, in a swift parting glance, each read—unseen by her—the same dear story in the other's gaze ; in an instant that dear old story was told again, felt, understood, and believed in.

By the new pang of separation, Violet felt how dear he had become to her, and by the utter indifference with which she viewed all others and all else she was to leave behind. And now even the solace of a single letter would be denied them both.

'I cannot see the end,' thought Douglas ; 'but I know this, thank God ! my sweet Violet loves me, not for what I possess, but for my own sake !'

CHAPTER XL

BARONS HALL.

LEFT alone in the quiet Belgravian mansion, with only a servant or two ; knowing no one, and having none to visit him ; deprived of the daily joy of seeing Violet, and knowing that the charms of her society were given to others, Douglas felt intolerably dull and *ennuied* for a time ; and, despite the coldness and unkindness of Katharine Jermyn, and the curious fits of pique and annoyance exhibited at times by Sir Jahleel, he missed the household, for it has been truly said that there is pleasure blended with pain in beholding a family circle when we have none or are ourselves alone.

His days passed slowly—slower still his evenings ; there was no music and there were no duets now. Save once, when by chance he met young Vincent Sheldon, who had just come from Barons Hall, he heard nothing of the Jermyns, and then what he did hear was only calculated to pique and annoy him. Sir Harry Honeywood and Captain Bramley were in constant attendance on the sisters ; riding on the downs, at balls in the Pavilion, polo on the racecourse, or drives on the Marine Parade from Kemp Town to Hove, and amid all the gaieties of 'Piccadilly-super-mare,' and 'while the Hussars are to the front,' poor Octave Bede is nowhere. 'There is little doubt,' added Vincent laughingly, 'that a proposal for Kate or Violet will soon be on the *tapis*—for Violet most likely, as Sir Harry has just presented her with one of the most beautiful Welsh ponies I ever saw. His sister, the charming Lady Basset, is there ; she dotes on Violet—and you know how one woman

can work the oracle with another, especially in the interests of a brother.'

'Pleasant this!' thought Douglas, as they separated. 'How long shall I act the part I am playing?—am I wise to do so? Or should I not write to old Charters and throw up the sponge—at once—volunteer for the Cape, or what?' and he twisted his black moustache, while an angry gleam came into his proud dark eyes. Then his expression would soften as he thought:

'Let me not doubt my dear little Violet. She cannot help it if idle dangles, who are encouraged to the full by her family, hang about her.'

Yet it was bitter to hear such things when in the early flush of his love-dream.

What a supreme pleasure it would be to have her sweet society for all the future, to have her dear face before him for all the days of his life! Of the realisation of this vision he saw little chance then; but if they were to be true to their plighted troth, was he to go on loving her, and she loving him, till he was an old bachelor and she an old maid? He shrank alike from the probability and improbability of such chances; and, sooth to say, such a system of celibacy has not a lively prospect for a young fellow of five or six and twenty.

Most monotonously to him stole on the hot and breathless days of the London August, when the white dust of the sun-baked streets powdered everything—especially the crisp and parched leaves of the trees and shrubs in the parks and squares; when the grass was dry, sere, and yellow; and when there was a stillness in the air or hazy sky—an utter want of all atmosphere that made the heart—especially the heart of one accustomed to the free mountain breezes of the north—seem to sink in the breast, one scarcely knew why.

In the drawing-room, though everything was now done up in Holland covers, and having ghost-like bags on the crystal lustres, he sometimes lingered, for a sense of Violet's presence was

there by association of ideas. Fain would he have touched the piano and played some of their old favourite airs ; but it was securely locked. The pictures they had often criticised together were all there unchanged, like the faces of old friends ; and there, too, hung 'the gem' of Adrian van der Werf, in which was involved some mystery that he failed to comprehend, though Mr. Joab Scrowle might have enlightened him thereon.

He strove to reckon the days till the household must inevitably return to town, and with it Violet ; but, strange to say, he had unaccountably a dim and gloomy foreboding that then some change was awaiting their secret intimacy and the tenor of their way, though he scarcely anticipated that it might involve his own dismissal.

Amid the whirl of gaiety that surrounded her at Barons Hall and at Brighton, a short distance from which the former stands in a richly-wooded district, Violet's thoughts were ever wandering to her lonely lover in London ; and she knew precisely how wearily the hours must pass with him when the work of penmanship was over.

Katharine was radiant at having excited suspicion in the mind of Sir Jahleel, and still more radiant that she had so suddenly separated Violet and Douglas ; but after a time, in the round of pleasures in which she was engaged, she perhaps forgot all about him, as being a subject beneath her consideration, and too trivial to be thought of.

The heedless Dolly, who was too thoughtless or innocent to care much for the wheels within each other that formed part of Kate's plans, and who had a sincere regard for Douglas, by references to him by name, as to how he would have admired this view, or liked that person, or how well *he* would have played, or done some particular thing, often made Violet's colour change perceptibly and Sir Jahleel wince.

Always full of superfluous vitality, Dolly was in her glory at Brighton, where she was daily looked for—even amid all the

thousand belles who were there—by many who loved to see her sweet, bright, wayward face and soft hair that rippled like gold in the sunshine ; and where she was in her element when galloping over the green swelling downs with Vincent Sheldon, Bramley, and Honeywood, boating near the long and stately pier, where the band was playing and the promenaders crowding in the pure sea-breeze.

Katharine Jermyn, aware of Dolly's great liking for Douglas as a friend, safe that in her love for Vincent Sheldon she never would be more, took the girl into her confidence, and besought her, as she valued the good and happiness of her father, to warn Violet against Douglas, for so suspicious was she by nature, that she almost feared they were corresponding in secret ; and she sharply scrutinised the contents of the despatch-box each morning, and even those enigmatical advertisements in the second columns of the daily papers.

Thus it was to Violet's surprise that she found herself taken seriously to task one night by the usually child-like and hoydenish Dolly.

The younger sister, from choice, shared the same sleeping apartment. Dolly was kneeling at her prayers, in her long, white night-dress, by the side of her pretty couch, and on her calm, pure, and then devout face, and on the shining masses of her bright hair, fell the light of the tall candles on the toilet-table. Near the latter sat Violet, the long, brown tresses of whom Mademoiselle Ricochette was brushing out for the night, a laborious process, which at last was accomplished, and she withdrew, no doubt anxious to return to the French romance, which she usually carried in her pocket.

Then Dolly, wrapping a cashmere robe about her, came to the side of Violet, who said smilingly :

' You have something to say to me, pet Dolly ; I can see it in your face.'

' I have indeed, Violet dear. I have been on the tenter-hooks all day to say it, and now don't know how to go about it,'

'Well ?

'It is about—about Mr. Douglas.'

'Papa's secretary. Well ?' said Violet, with just the slightest shade of alarm and irritation.

'If I were you I would keep him at a greater distance when we return to town, or should he come here on business, as there will be so much to do about this title of papa's. I can see, or have been given to understand, that his manner to you, however quiet and unobtrusive, annoys papa, and is closely watched by Kate, who says that he repels Sir Harry.'

Violet was more irritated, because her own inward conscience told her that this was perhaps the case ; but she beat the carpet with a little white-slipped foot, and said nothing. So Dolly spoke again :

'I would advise you to change your manner in some way when we return. Keep him more at a distance, I mean.'

'The idea of a dear little chit like you schooling me !' exclaimed Violet.

'There ! I knew how it would be, and told Kate so. You are angry with me.'

'Angry with you, my sweet little Dolly ! Who could ever be angry with you ?' cried Violet, as she laughingly kissed and embraced her. 'But,' she added, 'why have you broached this strange topic to-night ? You act under the influence of Kate : she has been speaking to you on the subject ?'

'Yes.'

'And why now, when here ?'

'She saw him when on the pier yesterday with Captain Bramley, just where Sir Harry saw him, she said, with a lady.'

'Impossible !' exclaimed Violet, with surprise and no small perturbation of spirit.

'Why impossible ? He nodded familiarly to Captain Bramley, who is more convinced than ever that he is the same Douglas who won the thousand napoleons from him at Monaco. So it cannot be impossible—why say so ?'

'Because I know that he posted letters to papa in London yesterday afternoon.'

'Well, Violet, I only tell you what Kate told to me, that she bowed very stiffly to Mr. Douglas, who bowed in return. He is, I believe, to get his *congé* from papa when we return to town. Poor fellow! I shall be so sorry for him, because he seems so friendless, and Vincent is so fond of him,' she added, kissing a coloured photo of that fortunate individual, and depositing it under her pillow.

Dolly's words gave Violet much to think of. If Douglas was actually in Brighton, it could only be with the hope to have a passing glance at herself; but before many weeks were passed, Dolly was fated to have more to agitate her, and more to think of than even Violet.

The latter shrank from questioning Katharine about this alleged meeting or recognition; but with anxious eyes, as the carriage rolled along the Marine Parade next day, she scanned the thousands who were promenading or loitering there; but scanned them in vain for the face or figure of him who was now dearer to her heart than her own life—all the dearer that there was much of romance in her love.

Barons Hall, though internally modernised even before Sir Jahleel's wealth acquired it from the thriftless heir of a long line, had much of ancient feudal and ancestral grandeur in its aspect and proportions. It rose from a sloping terrace, and consisted of three masses, one of which attained the dignity of a keep, and all were crowned by battlements in the Tudor style. Within it had feasted many a time that Duke of Norfolk who was mingled in the destiny of the hapless Queen of Scotland, and it was defended for a month against the Parliamentary forces by its then lord, the arms of whose last descendant above the entrance had recently been replaced by the three pugs heads *mangé*, collared and proper, of Sir Jahleel Jermyn, Knight, of Gresham Street and Belgravia.

Barons Hall had all the surroundings which confer grandeur

and dignity on an ancient place—glorious and stately trees wherein dwelt colonies of rooks; vast tracts of velvety grass, and a stream that flowed between green downs towards the Channel.

Though accustomed to the splendour of his country house, and the circle of society his own wealth and the beauty of his daughters attracted there, Sir Jahleel felt at times that the change of scene it afforded was a relief from the secret thoughts that harassed him now, and his terrible incubus, Joab Scrowle.

Yet he was haunted by the dread that when Douglas was in London, and left there alone, he might be in daily communication with Scrowle, as he had of late associated the two in his own mind.

'*Au revoir!*' the wretch had said mockingly, when he departed with his last extorted cheque; thus he was soon to come again.

'Oh Lord!' thought Sir Jahleel, 'how long shall I have to endure the punishment of my avaricious scheme, when spurred on by that devil of covetousness, the tempter of high and low—my scheme—my crime, for such it was? Till death comes, I suppose—for Scrowle will destroy me by slow degrees, if not by one fell swoop!'

His face would grow gloomy and pale and worn, when oppressed by such thoughts and fears of the hated Scrowle, over whose head he could no longer hold the forged bill, like the sword of Damocles.

Nemesis, the daughter of Nox, he had never heard of, and knew not by name; but he had a wholesome terror of some such deity, in a judge's wig and robes; and he thought, with a groan, of how little could the proud Kate and his two softer-hearted younger daughters imagine the fears that agitated him.

Suspense in a narrative or history was never to our taste; yet were we to confess now all that is coming in one paragraph, or omit occurrences in their due order, we should have no story to tell,

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

A DAY after this Douglas was surprised to find among his morning letters one addressed to himself, in the handwriting of a lady; and was still more so, to find that his fair correspondent was Miss Jermyn.

'Papa has been suffering from gout in the right hand, and being unable to write, has asked me to do so,' the letter began. 'He wishes to know if there are any letters from Scotland—at least from Mr. John Charters,' as he is, and we all of course are, anxious to hear how our peerage claim progresses. As the title was created by letters patent of James VI., and limited to the grantee and his heirs-general, and as the last lord died abroad without any, we understand it to be all plain enough, and we are most impatient to have it settled. Papa was surprised to hear that you were in Brighton, when he thought you were in town. You remember that Captain Bramley and I met you on the Pier.'

After a multitude of petty orders to be attended to—orders more suitable for such personages as Mrs. Jellybagg, the house-keeper, or Tapleigh, the butler—but given evidently, as Douglas knew from the character of Miss Jermyn, to remind him of his proper place and subordinate position, she curiously enough proceeded thus :

'Our circle here is a large and gay one, and includes, of course, Sir Harry Honeywood, who is ever so attentive to us all, but to my sister-Violet in particular. You remember that I hinted we might have a wedding in the family at Barons Hall; this, I have no doubt, you will be glad to learn. And he has formally obtained papa's permission to pay his addresses to her; and, of course, we all wish him the success he is sure to have—he is such a dear, good fellow, and so fond of Violet.'

As he read this, in the dark face of Douglas there came a

'Fellow, what do you mean by this impertinence? and what are you talking about? To the point, sir, at once!'

'Well, where is old Jahleel?'

'If you mean Sir Jahleel Jermyn——'

'Precisely so—Sir Jahleel Jermyn, of Selby and Jermyn, Gresham Street, in the City, though he don't much relish the name of Selby now. Where is he?'

'Not in town; the house is, as you may see, shut up.'

'But where is he?' demanded Scrowle with emphasis, as he struck his umbrella on the floor.

'I am unaccustomed to be questioned in this tone,' replied Douglas, who resented the unceremonious manner in which the father of Violet Jermyn was spoken of by this peculiar visitor.

'Is he at Barons Hall?'

'I decline to say where he is, unless I know your business with him.'

'That is my affair—not yours.'

'What is the object of your visit?'

'Money—money is my object.'

'I thought so.'

'And I'll have it, too!' said Scrowle, in a bullying tone.

'Not from me—I am not Sir Jahleel's cashier.'

'You can at least say where I may find him?'

'Certainly not, and you must excuse me, as I am busy,' said Douglas, with a hand on the bell, as a hint for his visitor to retire, but the latter manifested no intention of doing so.

'Don't be in a hurry, young man—don't be in a hurry; you and I have met before, and we may meet again oftener than you think. You have seen old Jahleel's daughters, of course? They are fine girls—uncommon fine girls!' he continued, with a leering wicked look in his blood-shot eyes, while Douglas listened, indignation blending with his bewilderment. 'Is it true that the youngest one is to be married to old Sheldon's heir?'

'Yes—but in what way can that possibly interest you?'

'More than you think, young man—more than you think. That marriage won't come off, if I can stop it!'

'You are intoxicated, fellow!' exclaimed Douglas, with his hand again on the bell, but Scrowle arrested his intention.

'No more a fellow than yourself,' replied Scrowle, biting his nether lip, while a malevolent gleam came into his watery eyes; 'but write to Sir Jahleel, and say that I—Joab Scrowle—insist that this marriage be broken off, and that before another step is taken in this matter he must have a meeting with *me*! Do you hear?'

'Yes—but fail to comprehend you.'

'I don't care whether you do or not,' was the insolent response; 'but lose no time in telling him this, verbally or by letter. Old Jahleel is a great card among old fogies in Bank parlours, and chaps upon 'Change; but he is very small beer to me, as you may know well enough. And now, good morning.'

Scrowle winked knowingly, put his baggy umbrella under his arm, set his battered hat airily on his head, and bowed himself out of the room, and his descent to the hall door was watched by Douglas, who thought he must be a madman, or worse.

Douglas had now food for new reflection. What could all this mean? He was perfectly aware that at the very name of Joab Scrowle Sir Jahleel seemed to tremble, and it was but too evident that this obnoxious personage possessed some mysterious influence over him.

Thus he thought that instead of writing, he might readily take advantage of the situation and have an interview with Sir Jahleel on the subject of Scrowle's visit, his strange threats, and demand for an interview.

With these for an excuse, he took the train for Brighton, hoping to see Violet, to judge of his fate and his future, even by a glance from her, and end the gnawing agony of his own heart—an agony induced by the letter of her 'cruel sister,' Kate.

The happiest people have no history, and certainly no mystery

connected with them, thought Douglas truly ; for it is a great misfortune, as Ouida says, 'to be born to a romantic history. The humdrum always think you are lying. In real truth, romance is common in life—commoner perhaps than commonplace ; but commonplace always looks more natural.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROPOSAL.

AWARE of what was on the tapis, or rather of what was impending over her, poor Violet had kept sedulously out of Sir Harry's way for some time, avoiding the usual promenades and drives in Brighton, and remaining within the house or grounds at Barons Hall.

Love-making, and perhaps proposals too, were no new matters to Sir Harry Honeywood. He knew that the immediate antecedents of Violet Jermyn were, of course, humble, and he considered her father's hope of a Scottish title a chimera, at which he always smiled ; but his wealth and his high position in the City were undeniable.

Sir Harry's hunters and equipages, his gambling propensities, his Highland forest and Irish bog, etc., required a considerable revenue to support them ; thus the dower that Violet would have, rendered her, together with her own great beauty, a most acceptable kind of bride, and he thought that under all the circumstances he had only 'to go in and win.'

He had dangled after the two unengaged sisters so long that he thought he was bound in honour to propose to one of them ; and felt that if he was to make a sacrifice of himself, he had better do so at the pretty feet of Violet ; thus it was with no great or lover-like perturbation of spirit or anxious fluttering of the heart that he quitted the Hussar Barracks on the Lewes Road in his 'tip-top' mail phaeton, with its high-stepping

greys in plated harness, and drove to Barons Hall, surveying as he went, with much appreciation, the sweeping curves of the graceful approach, the vast expanse of green lawn, the stately avenue, and the fine baronial old mansion of the Tudor times, that crowned the terrace whereon the peacocks strutted to and fro.

To all appearances he had come to make a mere morning call, and, strange to say, 'none of the family were at home except Miss Violet.' Either such was the order given by Miss Jermyn, or she and Sir Jahleel had mutually arranged that it should be so, and giving Sir Harry a fair chance on one hand, would leave Violet without the means of escape on the other.

She was in the drawing-room, intent, apparently, on something she was admiring or examining, when he was ushered in, hat in hand, and in the most correct of morning toilettes, from the waxen flower in his button-hole to his glazed boots. As he advanced through the wilderness of refined luxury which pervaded the long double drawing-rooms—inlaid cabinets, Japanese screens, antique vases, white statuettes, rare old china, lounges and ottomans—he saw only Violet.

There was a sad but soft smile in her eyes and on her parted lips, and she seemed so abstracted that she did not hear the visitor announced till he was close beside her, and then, raising her head in a startled manner, she hastily thrust, or concealed in the bosom of her dress, the object she had in her hand, but whether it was a letter or a photograph Sir Harry (who did not quite like the act) could not determine, so rapid was her movement, and she felt that she was blushing deeply while she gave him her hand, with an ill-concealed air of annoyance, for she knew what was to come, and that by the plans of Kate and their father, she was now, as Sir Harry would have phrased it, 'fairly run to earth.'

The sudden act of concealing something from him was so unusual and so unlike the general calmness of her demeanour, that, whatever the object was, he felt piqued, and it

roused in him more of the real lover than in his languid way he thought he was capable of feeling—yet his manner was somewhat cold and constrained as he said :

‘I call to-day, Miss Violet, with Sir Jahleel’s express permission, but I am sorry indeed to intrude upon your privacy.’

‘Do not think so, I beg of you,’ she replied, feeling that the tone and air he adopted were very different from the suave, playful, and half-flirting manner in which he was wont to address her and Kate.

‘I must, however, apologise,’ he began.

‘No, no, Sir Harry ; I am, as you see, quite alone.’

He seated himself near her, and though too well-bred to make any direct allusion to whatever it was she had been in such haste to hide from him, he had an uncomfortable feeling about the circumstance, and would rather it had not taken place, considering the errand on which he had come ; and thus, instead of opening the trenches at once, as he had thought to do, he found nothing more interesting to talk about than the beauty of the weather and the gaiety of Brighton, an oratorio at the Dome, a concert at the Aquarium, the octopus, the sea-lions, and so forth.

‘I have been looking for you everywhere, but in vain,’ said he, after a pause.

‘I have not felt well—the heat and—and—Sir Harry,’ murmured Violet a little incoherently, looking down under his steady and now almost ardent gaze, as it was impossible for him not to be greatly impressed by the soft, bright beauty of the girl he had deliberately come to win as a wife, and whose ‘good points’ he was just then disposed to scan and appraise to their full value. ‘Besides,’ she added, ‘I am tired already of those amusements at the Pavilion and drives on the Marine Parade, where we seem to meet the same kind of people at the same hour every day.’

‘Indoors your occupation may have been more attractive?’

‘I cannot say that it has,’ said she wearily.

'But you expected me to call to-day?' he asked, in a low voice, while drawing nearer and bending over her.

'No—how could I do so intuitively?'

'Did not your good papa make you aware, dearest Violet, (permit me to call you so) of the hopes I have cherished in my heart?'

Her 'good papa' had, indeed, done so, and though well aware of what she would have to undergo, she grew pale, and then coloured deeply to hear herself addressed thus by her Christian name, and for the first time, by Honeywood. It was such an advance upon all their late system of intercourse that she was startled.

As she made no reply, he repeated the question more earnestly and more tenderly, while attempting to capture her hands caressingly, and catch her half-averted eyes; and thus there ensued a break in the conversation that was very embarrassing to both, even to the completely self-contained man of the world, to whom love-making had probably been a cause of less consideration or anxiety, than the study of his betting book.

Hence, had there been more real pathos—more true tenderness and passion in the voice and manner of Sir Harry, Violet was too true a woman not to show infinitely greater pain at his manifested indifference than she did.

'You know that I love you, Violet, and have loved you long?' he resumed.

Violet knew that he had dangled in pretty close attendance upon herself and Kate, showing for herself a preference in general; but she could scarcely be said to know more; thus she said:

'I always knew that you admired me, Sir Harry; that you preferred me to most others as a dancer, a companion for a canter in the Row, and so forth; but indeed—indeed, I suspected nothing more.'

'I love you, Violet, dearly and tenderly. I have your father's

full permission to do so. Say that I, too, have yours—that you will be my wife, Violet,' he urged, with her right hand caressed between his own.

Violet trembled very much now, and the white lids of her eyes drooped, their long silky lashes seeming to rest upon her cheek, as she heard those words uttered which no true woman ever hears unmoved, or having heard them, can ever forget. But even while Honeywood was speaking she was drawing mental comparisons between him and Douglas, for though both were tall and slender, with that air of distinction which often comes with good descent, the dark eyes, soft olive skin, aquiline and delicate features of her accepted lover were in marked contrast with the china blue eyes, the tawny moustache, and fair complexion of his rival. More than all, great was the contrast between the deep, passionate, earnest, and apparently (so far as her family were concerned) hopeless love of Douglas, who possessed poetic thoughts and picturesque diction, and the glibly turned speeches of Sir Harry, and while listening to him she toyed with her engagement ring—the ring of Douglas's dead mother; not that she required to gather any courage from the act of doing so, but lovingly, as she thought of him.

And now, while Sir Harry was pausing for a reply to his proposal, the object which she had been so solicitous to conceal got somehow disengaged from the bosom of her dress and fell, unknown to her, upon the carpet at their feet. There it lay, plainly in sight, and was simply a photo of a man, whose face and figure were not unfamiliar to the baronet, for, sooth to say, they were those of Sholto Douglas, though he did not recognise them then.

But the entire circumstance was enough to make him wish that he had *not* come to Barons Hall on that particular forenoon.

He was too much a gentleman in nature and bearing to examine the likeness closely, as he picked up the card from the

carpet and restored it to her, saying, with a certain irrepressible emotion of pique and pain—

‘Allow me ; you have dropped this, Miss Violet.’

She was sensible that he had relinquished any term of endearment. Pale as death now—for she had before her a terror of Sir Jahleel, much domestic annoyance, and a probable catastrophe—she again almost unconsciously placed it in the breast of her dress.

‘Surely you must treasure that likeness very much that you keep it in a place so loving and so dear !’

He spoke with some pardonable bitterness now.

‘I prize it very much as a likeness of a dear friend,’ she replied faintly, and with difficulty restraining her tears.

‘So it would seem. But what male friend, may I ask ?’

‘I cannot see how that can interest you,’ she replied, feeling rather desperate.

‘Surely it does, Violet, after what I have just said to you !’

‘That I can scarcely admit,’ she said, gathering a little courage from the fact that he had failed to recognise the likeness. ‘I made no response, I gave no promise, and I hope this subject will be referred to no more.’

Her little hands were trembling, her eyes were flashing, and Sir Harry began to find that the conversation had suddenly taken a rather unexpected turn, and not a prosperous one for his suit.

‘Pardon me, if, after the declaration I made to you, I ask, is that likeness one you would object to show Sir Jahleel ?’

She hesitated and then said :

‘Yes ; decidedly.’

‘In that case, what am I to think ?’ he asked, gnawing his golden-coloured moustache.

‘I can but leave you to draw your own conclusions, with the hope that you will say nothing on the subject either to papa or Kate.’

‘Certainly. I shall be silent, as you wish it.’

'Thanks; very much,' she replied, placing both her hands confidently in his, yet with averted face. 'You have done me the highest honour a man can do a woman, Sir Harry; I regard and esteem you very, very much,' she continued, with her bosom heaving, her voice tremulous, and her eyes suffused with tears; 'I can dearly love you as a kind and pleasant friend; but more than that I cannot do.'

She felt the necessity for taking up a position at once, though evidently suffering acutely from the whole details of the interview.

'Then my love is a hopeless one?' said he.

She made no reply, but withdrew her hands, and bowed her handsome head in mute assent.

Sir Harry, at that moment she looked so touchingly beautiful, was longing to take her in his arms and shower kisses on her soft hair, on her delicately-lidded eyes, and pouting red lips; but, instead, he took up his hat and drew his gloves very deliberately on, saying the while, in a low voice:

'I do not yet despair. Another time, when you may think better of this proposal and of me, I may presume to address you once more. Till then, good-bye, dear Violet, for as such I shall ever think of you.'

Mechanically she rang the bell, and bowing low, he retired, leaving the little photo master of the situation. Though considerably agitated, Violet was too much absorbed in her love for Douglas to feel much compunction for the rejection of Sir Harry's suit; and, sooth to say, the hussar took it with great equanimity—so much so, that she began to be a little provoked, and felt not much flattered by the whole affair—a double emotion that made her cling more fondly to the love of Douglas; while it never occurred to her generous and unselfish heart that his regard for her might *not* be an unselfish or disinterested one.

So, she had just refused a wealthy and popular young baronet, whose patent dated from 1611, and she thought it

strange that—apart from fear of Sir Jahleel—she was so little moved or excited by it, beyond the agitation caused by having borne an important part in an unwelcome scene; and after he was gone, and whipping up his greys on the homeward road to the cavalry barracks, Violet, despite her father's certain wrath, the sharp taunts of Kate, and even gentle Dolly's surprise and probable advice, sat, with a soft expression on her face, thinking only of her absent lover, whose face to her, as to several others, suggested the romance of fate, and a speculative interest for which it was difficult to account, but which in women grows little by little into love.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS JERMYN STILL MORE MYSTIFIED.

THE baronet did not look much like a despairing personage or 'a blighted being,' as with a choice cigar between his lips he took his spanking greys towards the barracks. His self-esteem had been wounded that such a repulse had happened to him, and he thought it 'deuced lucky that Tom Tandem, Bramley, and the rest of the mess, knew nothing about it. I have been rather a fool—up a tree, by Jove!' And then he thought, with a laugh, that a certain fair one with golden locks and a frizzed front would not yet be deprived of her tiny brougham and little tiger.

He liked and admired Violet 'immensely,' to use his own phraseology, and no doubt loved her as much as it was possible for a *blasé* man of the world to do in his own way. He fancied he had rather compromised her and himself too; old Jermyn's money would not be unacceptable just then; so Sir Harry had thought that he would 'go in' for Violet and matrimony, but this style of love scarcely suited her deep and passionate nature.

He felt certain that her family were anxious that she should marry him because of his position, title, and fortune, and this knowledge, but for the great beauty and personal attractions of the girl herself, his nature would have revolted at.

It was strange—passing strange indeed—that, knowing what he *did* know (and what we shall have ere long to reveal), Sir Harry did not connect his rejection with the poor private secretary, Sholto Douglas, whose photograph he had failed quite to recognise, and yet had been nearly doing so.

While, full of his own thoughts, he was quitting the avenue of Barons Hall, he did not observe Douglas, who was proceeding to the house slowly on foot across the lawn, and pausing, looked after him. From the tenour of Miss Jermyn's missive the latter doubted not the errand on which the baronet had come, and for a moment or two his heart sank and he felt miserable, for in that very noon Violet might have been lost and won—lost to him, and won by a rival!

But little could he have pictured the stormy scene that was being acted at that very time in a room of the stately mansion the latter had just quitted, and when the guilty Violet—for guilty of enormous folly they deemed her—was confronted by Sir Jahleel and her sister Kate, both of whom proved to be 'at home.'

'You have actually refused Sir Harry Honeywood!' exclaimed Sir Jahleel, pale with rage, and with hands clenched above his bald head, while his eyes glared at her through his gold-rimmed glasses.

'I do not—I cannot love him, papa,' she urged, with her soft eyes full of tears, as she looked up apologetically and yearningly. 'I cannot love him, dear old *pater*!'

'Who asks you to do so? What the deuce has love, as you call it, to do with his proposal? Oh, this surpasses my patience!' he groaned.

He had hoped by such an influential marriage to counterbalance in some way (he knew not precisely how) the too

probable accusation of Scrowle, if it took any tangible form, by the production of the lost Selby; and now that hope was gone, unless—which was barely probable—Sir Harry would come forward again.

Among all the names on their visitors' list—among all the cards in the guest Sevres card-plate—none were more valued than those of Sir Harry Honeywood; and this was the finale. He had been refused by Violet!

The grey-green eyes of Kate were actually full of tears as she said:

'You are foolish and wicked—worse than wicked! However, let our title of Torthorwald once be won, we may ally ourselves to the bluest blood and the highest names in the British Isles, if your astounding folly does not lead you to some miserable *misalliance*! Can it be that he proposed to you jestingly?'

'I think I have been trained enough by society,' retorted Violet, 'to know now whether a man asks a woman's love in earnest or conventionally.'

Violet was very gentle by nature; her tears were falling fast, and the domestic storm she had raised was at its height when a servant, greatly to her agitation, somewhat untowardly announced that 'Mr. Douglas had just arrived from town to see Sir Jahleel.' The latter and his elder daughter exchanged two flashing glances.

Douglas, they suspected, was too probably the secret cause of this recent catastrophe, for as such they viewed the rejection of Sir Harry, and now had come the time for condign punishment; so both felt 'how much easier it is,' as Goldsmith says, 'to conceive than to describe the complicated sensations which are felt from a recent injury, and the pleasure of approaching vengeance.'

For some moments Sir Jahleel felt his heart brimming with the latter emotion, and inclined at all risks to dismiss Douglas with ignominy from his service; but he was miserably infirm of

purpose now. For that measure the haughty and exasperated Kate was fully prepared, as she and Violet withdrew; but she was not so for the mysterious and meek manner in which she eventually discovered her father met, and conferred with, his private secretary.

‘Good morning, Mr. Douglas—be seated,’ said he coldly, almost sternly; ‘and may I ask what brings you so soon to Brighton again?’

‘I have not been to Brighton for months, since I last came on business to Barons Hall,’ replied Douglas calmly, yet colouring visibly as he recalled a passage in Kate Jermyn’s letter.

Sir Jahleel eyed him closely.

‘If the person seen for the second time in Brighton was not Douglas, who on earth was he?’ thought the former; ‘who was it that had spoken of a “double-ganger,” whatever that might mean? Had he, too, his skeleton in the closet, that he always looked so visibly pained and put out of countenance when this remarkable resemblance of some one to himself was referred to?’

Sir Jahleel half-rejoiced, he knew not why, at the thought that another—more especially Douglas—should have, like himself, a *bête noir*.

One word served to turn the latter on the City knight.

‘Scrowle,’ began Douglas, and then paused, for the listener started and grew deadly pale. ‘Mr. Joab Scrowle called yesterday, and seemed most anxious to see you.’

‘Why did you not write or telegraph?’ asked Sir Jahleel, making a prodigious effort to appear calm.

‘His manner seemed so pressing, and, moreover, so very peculiar.’

‘Does Douglas presume on *this*?’ thought Sir Jahleel; ‘on what he knows, or something Scrowle has said? How peculiar?’ he asked aloud.

‘He spoke strangely and menacingly on the subject of your

youngest daughter's marriage with Mr. Vincent Sheldon—so strangely, that I deemed it better to see you in person on the subject; for if he is not mad, he ought to be handed over to the police.'

'How—why?' asked Sir Jahleel, with agitation.

'Because no person usually dares to enter a private house and comport himself as he has done; and dared to say that this marriage must not take place until you have accorded him a meeting. To tell you the truth, Sir Jahleel, I felt very much inclined to kick him downstairs, as I am unaccustomed to receive such visitors.'

'A most rash proceeding that might have been on your part, sir!' said Sir Jahleel.

'Excuse me,' replied Douglas, with some hauteur of manner, 'if I am disposed to resent his bearing even to me; but I am not quite what I seem. I am a private secretary because it is my whim to be one.'

'Your whim?' asked Sir Jahleel, to whom this sounded like a note of alarm; 'is it not for a subsistence?'

'At present, unfortunately, it is so.'

This admission greatly added to the discomfort of the knight. Even were Douglas *not* the lost heir (which at times seemed very improbable), or were young Selby dead, Scrowle was quite artful enough to tutor some creature of his own to personate the abducted heir of Selby. The world hears of strange claimants now and then, so why not one for the fortune of the late wealthy senior partner in Gresham Street? And, then, the present day had been rather fertile in producing troublesome and peculiar claimants to both rank and fortune. Bitterly he thought:

'Oh, what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive!'

During a pause that ensued, he appeared sunk in reflection, and actually seemed to age more under the scrutinising eyes of Douglas, while his agitation was painfully visible.

Then, making a vigorous effort to appear calm, he requested Douglas to rehearse more than once all that had passed between him and Scrowle.

‘And so—this was all he said?’

‘All, Sir Jahleel.’

‘The man must be a lunatic, and a dangerous one,’ said the latter, feeling the necessity of affecting a brave front, even though Douglas might know better, and be aware of more than he admitted. ‘Who but a lunatic would utter the threats and boasts that he did concerning the marriage of my youngest daughter?’

‘Who indeed, Sir Jahleel? Such were my own thoughts.’

‘You have seen this man before?’ said Sir Jahleel, eyeing Douglas sharply.

‘You are aware that I have.’

‘And he boasted to me of knowing you, and that you would be better acquainted in time.’

‘For that I have no desire; but perhaps the man was intoxicated when saying that to you, as when I saw him last. In your place, I would appeal to the authorities. A man who thrusts himself into a private house, uttering vague threats in this manner, should be placed under some supervision.’

‘I agree with you, and think you did quite right in coming direct to me on the subject. But hold no communication with him either by letter or otherwise, save briefly to say, should he turn up again, that I shall be in Gresham Street to-morrow and for the rest of the week, and when he comes, then that—I—’

Sir Jahleel paused as he contemplated the probable amount of the cheque to be extorted from him, and wiped his head with his handkerchief.

‘That you will appeal to the nearest police magistrate,’ suggested Douglas.

Sir Jahleel winced at the words, for Scrowle had made use of the same phrase with reference to himself.

'I shall see him—that is enough. You return to town this evening, I presume?'

'Yes, Sir Jahleel. I trust the young ladies are well.'

'Yes,' was the curt response of the merchant, now recalling, for the first time, the great untoward event of the forenoon; 'do you walk back to Brighton?'

'Yes; by the path that leads to the Maze—it is so charming!'

'Have some lunch before you go. Tapleigh will have something ready for you in the dining-room.'

'Thanks, Sir Jahleel.'

To Douglas's surprise, and somewhat to his relief, not a word was said of Violet or Sir Harry Honeywood, so he knew not whether the proposal had been accepted or declined; and thus he departed, conscious only that he had left his employer utterly miserable—or certainly looking so.

'How airily our peculiar friend, Mr. Douglas, is walking through the lawn from the house,' said Kate Jermyn, with a radiant and haughty smile, as she rejoined her father. 'He certainly takes his dismissal very coolly. Perhaps he has taken an extra glass of wine with his lunch?'

'I have *not* dismissed him.'

'What?'

Sir Jahleel groaned in sore perplexity of mind, and recalled the strange admission of Douglas that he only acted as private secretary in 'a whim.'

'Are you mad, papa?'

'I shall end by being so, I fear.'

'What do you mean?' asked Kate scornfully.

'That which I cannot tell you—leave me to myself. Tell Tapleigh to send me some dry sherry; I feel rather exhausted. I have letters to attend to, and start for town to-night.'

'To-night?'

'Yes.'

'This is mystery upon *mystery*!' exclaimed Kate, with her shapely white hand impatiently smoothing back the ripples of her shiny fair hair; 'mystery upon mystery!'

'Be it so,' replied her father wearily and testily.

'To London to-night,' continued Kate; 'but you will be back——'

'Perhaps not for a week.'

'A week! when we have a dinner-party to-morrow, and Captain Bramley, Major Tandem, and so many more are coming!'

'I can't help it. Put off your party, or let Lady Basset play propriety. I shall not be here, Kate.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAZE.

As he descended from the balustraded terrace and crossed the velvety lawn, Douglas looked back once or twice at the many mullioned and cusped windows in the spacious façade of the stately edifice he had left, and wondered which of them might light the apartment of Violet, or from which of them might she now be watching his departure—if, indeed, she was aware of his visit—of his presence there.

It was hard to be so near and yet so far from her—hard to leave without seeing her, and with his heart full of love that mingled with doubt and dread now. He had hoped to see, to hear of, if not to speak with her, and now he was returning sadly, without that hope having been gratified in the smallest degree, back to London and his life of dulness and triviality. He felt keenly just at that moment how such a life was dulling his intelligence and cramping his spirit; so true it is, as a writer has it, that 'the pure impersonal efforts of the mind may be heightened by a great joy or deepened by a great sorrow,

but a life of perpetual triviality, which has been condensed into the one common and comprehensive word *worry*, does so irritate and yet benumb the faculties that all intellectual effort dies out under it.' And nearly so was it now with Douglas.

At a little distance he saw the lovers, Dolly and Vincent Sheldon, rambling together in the grounds, and pausing from time to time, she looking up at her *fiancé* as his arm went round her waist, with pure love and devotion in her eyes, and a pang—perhaps an envious one—went through his heart as he thought of the brightness and joy of their future as contrasted with the vagueness, the utter gloom and poverty that enveloped his own.

Then the peculiar threats and warnings of Joab Scrowle occurred to him ; but he thrust them aside as unworthy his consideration, though they exerted a manifest influence over his employer.

How still seemed all around him ! We all know how singular—almost oppressive—seems the silence of the country after the incessant roar and bustle of a great city, but never are we so sensible of this as after quitting London.

Heedless of the charm of the sylvan scenery and of the beauty of the evening, he walked slowly and lingeringly on, loath to leave a place connected with the presence of Violet. From the west, the long and almost level rays of the August sun passed across the emerald green lawn, and down the long avenue, tipping with golden and fiery splendour the gnarled trunks of the old trees—old perhaps as the days of the Armada. The mansion was hidden from view, and Douglas was passing near an intricate arrangement of holly and privet hedge known as the Maze or Labyrinth—a place much affected by lovers in general and by Dolly and Vincent in particular—when suddenly he found himself face to face with—Violet !

Violet, in a lonely but lovely little dell—a veritable sleepy hollow, embosomed in the fragrant coppice, and where the flowers, loved so much, abounded,

Short though the time of separation, and short though the distance from London—only fifty miles—Violet threw up her pretty hands wildly as she met him. She had been wretched, utterly so, since they had been parted, without a word of farewell, a kiss, or a mutual message, or promise of remembrance.

‘My darling!’ he exclaimed, as he took both her proffered hands and drew her close to him; ‘how came you to be here alone and so opportunely?’

‘I heard papa ask you how you returned to Brighton, and you said you would pass down by the Maze, and so—I am here! You are not disappointed?’ she added coyly; ‘I knew that we had no other chance of exchanging a word——’

‘Or a kiss!’ he exclaimed with rapture.

The separation of a few weeks—a separation which no letter or tidings of each other had softened (for Sir Jahleel, though often in town, had never condescended to speak of his daughters to his secretary)—made this pair dearer to each other, and enhanced a love which on the part of Douglas was no common one, as it partook of something like adoration.

To Violet he said nothing about the obnoxious Scrowle, or of that person’s visit, though she observed, after a pause, while her face nestled in his neck:

‘You had particular business with papa, I understand?’

‘Yes; but it was not that which brought me here.’

‘What then?’

‘Can you ask me? What but the craving desire to see you, to hear of you, and to be near you, even though we did not interchange a word with each other?’

‘But you were here last week, darling?’

‘I—no.’

‘Kate saw you and bowed to you.’

He kissed her on the eyes to hide the expression of annoyance which he felt was in his face, as he remembered Miss Jermyn’s letter.

'It is all some incomprehensible mistake,' said he. 'Honey-wood sees you often, I suppose?' he added, to change the subject.

'Oh yes,' replied Violet, colouring deeply, yet surprised at the familiar and off-hand way in which he spoke of the wealthy and fashionable baronet; 'you and he are old friends, I know.'

'Does he ever speak of me?' asked Douglas, with a slight shade of anxiety in his eyes.

'Never.'

'He made you a proposal, Violet?'

'How do you know that?' she asked, with astonishment.

'Your sister, Miss Jermyn, favoured me with a letter on the subject.'

'Kate! How cruel of her!'

'He did propose, though?'

'Yes,' she replied, in a low and reluctant voice.

'And you refused him?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, my darling! my darling! With God's help, I may make up all this sacrifice to you yet.'

'It was no sacrifice at all, my dear one!'

The loving and almost tearful expression with which the dark eyes of Douglas were regarding her as he pressed her to his breast seemed to change as he spoke, and a long and wistful one stole into them as he appeared to bend them on some horizon seen by himself alone.

'Believe me, Violet, that loyal and tender is the love I have given you; but more generous and noble is that you have given me,' said he, in a low and broken voice; 'yet I deem myself dishonourable, Violet, in winning you without that permission which your father would never accord, and by placing you in a false and most embarrassing position with your family by our secret engagement—a thing so utterly out of the calculation of them all.'

'Do not speak thus, Sholto,' said she lovingly, in her sweet, low tones.

'I was born for better things than I have yet achieved—in all, at least, save winning the love of you, Violet. Till then I was enduring an existence in which my mind had no share; and my life, short as it has been, was filled only by shadows, on which memory loved to linger. I have no one to love, or to love me, but you, Violet,' he continued, drawing her head caressingly on his breast, while his voice trembled. 'All I loved on earth are dead now; I have left them behind me, and must journey on through this life without them. So judge how tenderly and truly my heart must cling to you!'

There was a pathos in his voice and in his words that made the upturned eyes of Violet fill with tears.

'While I have your promised troth and your mother's ring, so shall I ever cling to you, Sholto.'

'How I wish that she had lived to see you!' he exclaimed, with a smile now, for in his breast 'grief was dead, but not the fond regret that never leaves a faithful heart.'

'And your father, Sholto?—tell me of your father. Pardon me, darling, if I pain you,' she added, as she saw a deep and sudden gloom pervade his face, while the peculiar knit in his brow became strongly defined.

Though in the natural suspicion he had of *who* Douglas was, Sir Jahleel would have been a little relieved in mind to know that he had memories of his parents, on the other hand, he might have thought they were only invented to delude the hearer, as part of a plot with Scrowle.

'Now we must part,' said he, with a sad fond look in his face, 'or I shall miss the inexorable train.'

'Say once again,' said the cooing voice, 'that you will always love me, Sholto—always love me, as you do now.'

'Love you! Oh, Violet!' exclaimed he, in a broken voice.

Yet, strange to say, though his heart was true as steel, there

was something in that heart which was deep and far away, and which he would not reveal even to her just yet.

'If I am not permitted to be your wife, Sholto,' said she, in a low and agitated voice, as he pressed her to his breast, 'I shall never be the wife of another. I swear it, by the heaven that hears me.'

She glanced round nervously, a rustling in the bushes now suggesting an idea of eavesdroppers, and a vague terror of Kate.

Another mute embrace and they were compelled to separate, for now the sun had set, but to separate with an arrangement to meet that day week, at the same hour and place.

After he had left Violet, and had waved back to her his last farewell, he seemed to travel on air! How luxuriant seemed the greenness of the grass, the foliage of the trees; how sweet the faint odour of roses that came from the adjacent shrubberies; how soft the evening air; how bright the blue of the sea, as seen through a gap in the downs. Great, indeed, was his love, and deep his gratitude to Violet for her affection, and all that affection led her to relinquish.

When and where were the end of it all? Ay, there was the rub! Yet he was tumultuously happy as he took his seat in a second-class carriage for London.

Sir Jahleel Jermyn, of Barons Hall and Gresham Street, travelled in a 'first' by the same train, but in a very different mood of mind!

CHAPTER XVI.

VIOLET RECEIVES A SHOCK.

ON a subsequent day, Kate and Violet, after dismissing the carriage, were promenading with thousands of others on the Marine Parade—that magnificent and unparalleled sea-wall—watching the pleasure-boats shooting off from the beach or pier,

and listening to the music of the various bands in front of the great hotels and palatial boarding-houses.

The sisters were very silent, each being full of her own thoughts; Kate's were those of utter perplexity, together with an emotion of indignation at her father for the mystery of his movements, and resolution to retain Douglas in his service, even after the rejection of Sir Harry's suit, which, she never doubted, was due to his mal-influence upon Violet.

The latter was full of happy thoughts of yesterday, and the meeting in the Labyrinth or Maze, with anticipation of that which might come. There was a fine breeze from the sea, which rolled heavily up the vast extent of shingly beach; and exhilarated by the purity of the atmosphere, the brilliance of the sunshine, and the general gaiety of the scene, Violet was just then in her happiest mood, when they met, hand in hand, the lisping curate of Barons Hall, with his parted hair, light moustache, orthodox long-tailed coat, and Roman collar, and he joined them in their slow promenade.

The Reverend Octave Paschal Bede, with his dumb admiration and reverent looks of the love he was too timid to express otherwise, and at which the proud Kate often laughed, was somewhat of a bore to her, for she was utterly heedless of the fact or sentiment that there is anything more rare and lofty than absurd in the worship of one being for another; but then the curate was an adorer who, as she was wont to say, 'kept Lent all the year round on eighty pounds per annum.'

'But you could give him a hundred thousand,' said Dolly on one occasion.

'If I were fool enough to think of this, would papa let me?' she said, in reply.

The usual greetings duly over, and unanimity of expressions uttered as to the beauty of the day, Mr. Bede said:

'I have just had a most extraordinary instance of shortness of memory, to call it by the gentlest name, Miss Jermyn.'

'How?' asked Kate languidly.

'I met Mr. Douglas—Mr. Sholto Douglas, Sir Jahleel's secretary—quitting an hotel with a lady, a few minutes ago, and I bowed to him, but he cut me dead !'

'Cut you?' said Violet, in a breathless voice.

'Well, or responded to my bow so curtly, vaguely, and vacantly, that he did not seem to know me.'

'With a lady, was he? Did not want to be known, more probably,' said Kate, looking maliciously at Violet.

'I think this barely possible,' said the latter, taking courage.

'Why?' asked Kate.

'Because he left Barons Hall yesterday evening.'

'But *not* Brighton, probably. He seems fond of acting the gallant in this gay place.'

'Could it be a sister with whom he was seen?' thought Violet, who felt her heart sink a little. 'But Douglas never spoke of any sister, and have I not heard him say again and again that he was alone in the world, and that all he had loved were dead?'

'He will deny having been at Brighton, as he did of being at Monaco, I have no doubt,' said Kate.

'I heard Captain Bramley speak to Sir Harry Honeywood of Douglas and their meeting at Monaco, and Sir Harry scouted the idea that it was the same person. He laughed Bramley down,' said Violet, 'saying that he knew more of Douglas than any of us did; that he thought him eccentric, but of irreproachable honour.'

'Yes,' said the curate, 'and I have always thought him a character—and a character is a remnant of romance—of uncivilized times, and as such, to become rarer every day, like Queen Anne's farthings.'

'You were ever pitiless to him, Kate,' said Violet, with difficulty repressing tears of mortification at a situation which she could not unravel; 'and, under your quietly stinging remarks, how often have I seen his dark eyes flash, and the

half-repressed working of his nether lip as he bore them all in dignified silence.'

'For your sake, I suppose!' was the marked response; 'but I did not think that a sister of mine would condescend to scrutinise so closely a man in his social position.'

'There they are—Mr. Douglas and the lady!' exclaimed the curate, producing his binocular from the case in which he wore it suspended over his shoulder.

'Where?' demanded Kate impetuously.

'Just entering that pleasure-boat at the pier side.

'Allow me—thanks,' said Kate, and after taking a peep at the pair, she handed the lorgnette, which was a powerful one, to Violet, with an expression of unmistakable triumph and malice.

Violet's little hands, carefully cased in pale lavender gloves, trembled only too apparently, and she grew very white indeed as she saw Douglas, attired nearly the same as yesterday, the knit smoothed out of his dark brow, and with a soft, bright smile on his face, tenderly seat on the stern cushions of the boat a bright, golden-haired, and happy-looking young girl, and, after holding her hands lovingly in his own for a moment, ship his sculls and pull away vigorously seaward.

The boat speedily disappeared round the head of the Pier, and when in sight again, some ten minutes after, it was at a considerable distance from the Parade and beach. It was floating idly on the glassy water under the brilliant sunshine, and the rower and the girl were now seated side by side—his arm round her, as the lorgnette plainly showed; her bonnet off, and her head reposing on his breast!

Violet's agitation was too apparent now, as she restored the glass to its owner. Her lips were quivering, and she drew her veil down to them. Even Kate felt sorrow for her, or something akin to it, and seeing the necessity for their being alone, she speedily rid herself of the Reverend Octave Bede by despatching him on an errand for her to a circulating library at a

considerable distance, and then she hurried Violet away with her in precisely an opposite direction.

Violet looked but once after the fatal boat, and now it had diminished to a speck upon the blue water, that glittered and seemed to quiver or vibrate in the sunshine. Kate as yet was silent.

'Oh, why do I weep for him—why regret him?' sighed Violet; 'he could not have really cared for me—could not have loved me!'

The terrible suspicion that he was perhaps about to jilt another, for the sake of *her* fortune, occurred with terrible poignance to her mind. 'There is a tragic hour in most lives, however tame and commonplace may be their current;' and to poor Violet it now seemed that this tragic hour had come to her!

Her sister was regarding her closely, keenly, sternly now.

'I see it all!' she exclaimed; 'I see it all, and more distinctly now, and yet papa will still retain this person! It is nothing short of midsummer madness!'

'Have some mercy on me, Kate!' urged Violet, who was weeping freely now.

'How dared he presume, as I now see he has presumed, to talk of love to you, and then treat you thus? The *parvenu*—the artful *parvenu*!' exclaimed Kate, stamping her shapely foot on the ground, with the bitterness of heart she felt for Violet, whose thoughts she expressed, though the gentle girl was voiceless and tearful.

'Can she have been so mad—so utterly injudicious, as to have surrendered her heart so completely into the keeping of another?' thought Kate, with growing wrath; 'and of all men, to this penniless, and certainly dubiously charactered Scotsman? Did not Sir Harry tell us,' she asked aloud, 'that he had seen him here at Brighton, with a fair-haired girl, doubtless the same gipsy who is now in the boat with him?'

'Yes; but at a time when we knew that it was impossible he could have been here,' said Violet in a low voice.

‘But what do you think now?’

‘I cannot say; besides, it is nothing to me.’

‘I am glad to hear you say so,’ said Kate, still eyeing her keenly, and seeing that her tears were falling fast; and really, sooth to say, the grey-green eyes of the undoubtedly handsome but imperious Kate were just then glittering like those of an infuriated cat, and she proceeded to rail again in the bitterness of her heart. ‘This gentleman, of doubtful parentage, or at least peculiar antecedents, who seems to have been everywhere, like a rolling stone gathering no moss—this Douglas, who Bramley maintains fleeced him at Monaco, where he was always going in for *roulette* and *trente-et-quarante*, and inevitable pick-me-ups, and whose propriety is so very dubious, is decidedly your evil genius, Violet! More than all, I heard Captain Bramley speak of Douglas as “a cool hand; knew him when in the Austrian Hussars as a fellow of experience, and, like all soldiers, had no doubt wooed and won the love of many a girl under the hot sun of many a far-off land,” and much more to the same purpose. Remember, too, that we have heard him admit that he had been in Vienna.’

‘But never that he had been in the army.’

‘His denials cannot go for much, nor his admissions either. But you are now warned in time. This daring adventurer, who schemes to win your regard—to entangle you, it may be, into a private marriage—may, for all we know, be married already to another; to the very girl who is now in yonder boat; and you might be, like that other wife, only the sport, the plaything of an hour!’

‘Oh, Kate,’ sighed poor Violet, ‘how your tongue runs riot!’

‘A man without kith or kin, or settled habitation,’ exclaimed the elder sister, stamping her foot again. ‘I am indeed sorry to see a sister of mine so humiliated.’

‘I am indeed so; but amid all your wild surmises you quite forget that he was warmly recommended to papa by his old

friend, Mr. John Charters ; and that if papa has any doubts, he should make inquiries of him. Why does he not do so ?'

'About this Mr. Douglas ?'

'Yes.'

'I don't know ; I only know one thing——'

'Which is ?'

'That inquiries might prove very inconvenient to the said Mr. Sholto Douglas.'

(Kate, in her scornful mood, could little realise Sir Jahleel's fear that any inquiries might prove very inconvenient to himself !)

After this Kate had most of the conversation to herself. They had wandered towards the Hove End or lonelier part of the Parade, where Violet lingered, watching the heavy rollers of the incoming tide rushing in high and furious succession up the stony or pebbled beach with a moaning and lamenting sound that went straight to her heart—a heart that she felt had been cruelly and suddenly thrust back upon herself.

'Let us return to the carriage, and then home,' said she.

At that moment Sir Harry and his friend Bramley both passed on horseback at a slow pace, and both lifted their hats to the sisters, who thought the former looked long and lingeringly after them.

'Oh,' thought Kate, 'that this boating episode had occurred but two days ago—only two days !'

'Thank heaven we came to the Parade at the hour we did !' said Kate. 'This piece of folly forgotten, you may yet be as happy as Dolly is likely to be with dear Vincent Sheldon.'

Her heart filled with fresh hope. They must, she knew, meet Sir Harry at those places where everyone met everyone else, as his regiment would be for all the season in Brighton. Sir Harry would be sure to come forward again if judiciously managed—he was scarcely the man to be put down by one

rebuff; and, catching her wounded heart on the rebound, he would be certain of success now; and ere the family returned to town, surely Providence would suggest some means or plan for ridding the household of the artful interloper, Douglas!

CHAPTER XVII.

A CRUEL ALTERNATIVE.

It is towards the close of a dull and sultry August day, when the London sky, though without cloud, is also without a vestige of azure, but is entirely pervaded by a peculiarly hideous haze, and when the atmosphere, if it can be called such, is of a breathless and depressing nature, and Sir Jahleel is alone in his private business room in Gresham Street, after the last of his clerks—who has loitered long, yet feared to go—has finally and joyfully taken his departure.

Footsteps came through the outer office; the room door opened and closed again; Sir Jahleel looked up from his writing table, and saw before him the pale and pimply face, the thick red nose, the narrow forehead and snake-like eyes of his 'skeleton,' Joab Scrowle.

'Good afternoon,' said the latter jauntily, as he took off his hat and held forth a not very clean hand, which Sir Jahleel felt himself compelled to take, though its cold and fish-like touch made him shudder.

'Here again—already!' said he, with a kind of groan.

'Here again—precisely so; do you think I would be long of coming again to see so kind and good a friend as you?'

'I have paid you well, and surely the world is wide enough for you and I to keep apart now.'

'There you mistake,' said the other, seating himself on the edge of a chair, with his hands crossed on the knob of his umbrella, his chin planted upon them, and an expression of keen enjoyment at the mental torture he gave his victim radiating

and rippling over all his hideous visage ; ' there you mistake ; the world is a very small place—one just has room in it sometimes to turn round ; so we are always shoving up against somebody. In Belgravia, the other day, I shoved up against—who do you think ? Old Selby's son !'

' Liar !'

' Oh, don't use hard names—two can play at that game. And don't grip that paper knife so ; it ain't a bowie one,' replied Scrowle, with fierce mockery.

' Your object, of course, is money again ?'

' Money is the root of all evil, say the copy-books and goody-goody stories, and if old Selby's son had been without it, the boy wouldn't have been left adrift one night in the streets of Rotterdam ; but money is the root of an enormous amount of good, and plenty of liquor and fun, and money I mean to have when I want it. However, I did not come quite to talk about that just now.'

' Then, in the name of the devil, what did you come to talk about ?' asked Sir Jahleel, gathering a little courage, and glaring with intense hatred through his glasses at the speaker.

' Well—to discuss a little family arrangement with you,' replied the bantering wretch ; ' the forged bill, the possession of which gave you so much power over me, no longer exists. Hear me quietly—you'd better ! The forgery is obliterated—the bill no longer exists, I say ; but the son of old Selby does, and I have come to name finally the price of keeping dark about *him* !'

' This sort of thing is enough to kill me, Scrowle,' said Sir Jahleel almost piteously ; ' Gull says I have an affection of the heart.'

' Then he knows more than I do.'

' How ?'

' I didn't know you had one ; but you look the picture of health and strength—flourishing like the green bay tree, as the wicked always do.'

'I may live to three score and ten—at least I hope so,' said the merchant, to whom wealth and prosperity made existence very sweet.

'Made your will, old fellow?' asked Scrowle, after a pause.

'Of course.'

'Ah, well, you may have to change it a bit perhaps with reference to a certain event, and put in a codicil for the benefit of your dear friend, Joab Scrowle, Esquire.'

Tired of this banter, and feeling rather desperate, Sir Jahleel sprang furiously from his chair; but Scrowle waved his hand deprecatingly, and said calmly:

'All serene, old Jahleel. Don't rile up in this fashion; life is too short for excitements of this kind. You'll wear your blessed earthly tabernacle out before its time, and before old Boots is ready for you.'

'To the point!' said the hunted man, glancing haggardly towards the drawer in which his bank-book lay. Scrowle saw the glance, and laughed, but said—

'I came about something else than mere money just now—to take your advice about settling for life. Hear me quietly.'

'If I can! Talk to the matter in point.'

'I was just about to do so—of your youngest daughter—Dolly.'

'Dolly! How dare you—you cur!'

'Miss Adolphine, then.'

'Well—what the devil of her?'

'She is a clipper—a stunner—worth all the money in the Bank of England close by,' said Scrowle, licking his cracked lips and rolling his bloodshot eyes about in a rapturous but rather alarming way; 'she is just the wife to suit me—and I mean to have her!'

Sir Jahleel remained silent for a minute or two, for the intense absurdity or outrageous audacity of this speech surpassed all that Scrowle had yet said. Nor was it until the latter, who seemed perfectly sober, had repeated again and again in very

plain terms that Dolly's hand, with her dowry, would alone be the price of his silence now, or prevent him making an affidavit before a magistrate and producing the lost Philip Selby, that Sir Jahleel understood him. When convinced that Scrowle was in earnest in this monstrous proposal, all the rage, fear, and disgust that were blended in Sir Jahleel's face, and all the passion that surged through his breast, were as calmness and meekness when compared with his emotions now !

He leaned back in his chair in silence, for language failed him, and looked at Scrowle as if he was some hideous unreality ; and Scrowle looked back at him across the writing-table with a smile of intense enjoyment, malignance and triumph in his shifty, cunning eyes.

' Utter my daughter's name again,' said Sir Jahleel, in a low and concentrated voice, ' and by the heaven that hears me, old as I am, I'll strangle you !'

' No you won't,' laughed Scrowle.

' Why, what will prevent me ?' asked the other briskly, whilst his fingers opened and shut convulsively.

' Because you are old and fat and feeble, and two can play at that game ; and because you are too much of a coward to add murder to the abduction and robbery which I can prove against you at any time at the Guildhall or elsewhere. So now, Sir Jahleel, let us talk the matter over quietly, and let us understand each other. Your daughter Dolly must become Mrs. Joab Scrowle or you know the alternative !'

It seemed incomprehensible that a proposal so daring, so revolting and insulting, should be calmly made to him in that quiet and familiar room where he had transacted so much business for so many long years. Yet so it was, and Scrowle reiterated it, as if enjoying—which he did—the alternate pangs of wrath and fear he inflicted. His brain seemed to burn—his head to swim.

' Begone ! Leave me—leave me—ere it is too late, and I am driven to madness !' said the miserable man hoarsely. ' I will

face ruin and death, too, rather than agree to such an awful sacrifice—to terms that surpass all the pains of shame and the penalties of exposure !

‘Very well—very well,’ replied Joab Scrowle, drawing on slowly and with exasperating leisure his tattered kid gloves. Then he placed his rather broken hat airily on one side of his head, and said, ‘I am off like a bird. Cab for Guildhall !’ he added mockingly.

The sound of steps receding through the outer office and waking the echoes of its emptiness roused Sir Jahleel from a species of stupor.

‘Come back !’ he exclaimed.

‘I thought you would think better of it,’ said Joab Scrowle, returning and resuming his seat with a grimace of triumph in his face ; ‘you’ll be as you wish—a peer of the realm yet, my old trump !’

Making a prodigious effort to be calm, Sir Jahleel said in a low and weak voice :

‘If Selby’s son is alive, as you always assert he is, where is he ?’

‘Here—in this city of London—where I can lay my hand on him at any moment.’

‘Where does he live ?’

‘That is my secret.’

‘Under what name does he pass—his father’s ?’

‘No.’

‘How ? What, then ?’

‘That is my secret, too,’ replied Scrowle. ‘Young Selby had, you know, a flesh mark—a mother’s mark, I think it is called.’

‘I remember—a round scarlet spot just between his shoulders.’

‘Precisely so. How good your memory is. But he may know nothing of it himself, not having eyes in the back of his head.’

‘Tell me, is my secretary, Douglas, the son of Selby ?’

'As likely him as anyone else,' replied Scrowle, with an expression of intense cunning. 'But what makes you ask?'

'A fancied resemblance.'

'Anything more?'

'Well, there is a kind of mystery about his antecedents.'

'I have often thought he was feigning.'

'How?'

'Seeming to be what he is *not*.'

Sir Jahleel winced at this remark, as it seemed to corroborate his own suspicions.

'He never tells, even incidentally, what or who his people were, and I have only learned that, among many other places, he was at Rotterdam in his boyhood.'

'Oh, oh,' exclaimed Scrowle at this incautious admission. 'Rotterdam, where I lost Selby's son. And so you are afraid of him?'

'In one sense I am,' replied Sir Jahleel, feeling quite worn out and crushed. 'I implore you to tell me if he is the abducted boy you threaten to produce?'

'I won't say whether he is or is not, until I see how you mean to act by me.'

'In what way?'

'In the matter of the girl and her money,' was the blunt reply, that made Sir Jahleel's eyes flash again, and his whole form to quiver as if stung by a scorpion. 'That matter settled comfortably will make all square between us, and tie up my tongue and my hands in your interest for ever.'

'Can you rid me of Douglas?'

'Yes.'

'But when?'

'When my time comes.'

'For what, wretch?'

'Marrying your little daughter,' was the confident response. 'Rid of Douglas?' he added, 'by Jove, you'll have to get rid of young Sheldon first, and clear the way for me, or I'll clear

it for myself. Think over it, and write me to this address before to-morrow night, or you know the alternative ! You haven't a leg to stand on—not even a toe, for the matter of that. If I peach, as I swear I shall do, you'll not escape even by the skin of your teeth, old fellow—that is all !

And with this vulgarly-expressed threat, Joab Scrowle departed, after depositing a calling-card on the merchant's desk.

Long sat the latter, sunk in thoughts too terrible for description.

'Alive—alive ! after all,' he muttered, 'after all the hush-money I have given to this detestable kite ? Can he really be the man who calls himself Douglas, and whose manner is so cool, so calm, so confident, and yet mysterious ? Curses—curses ! Does this account for the likeness I seemed to see—or thought I saw—on the first day we met—that day of ill-omen—a likeness to the Selbys ? Merciful God !' he groaned after a time, 'I am justly and righteously punished for the greed and criminal avarice of my earlier life ; but on my poor child—my darling Dolly—must the heavier punishment fall.'

The cruel treachery to one whom he thought, like his father, had long slept with the dead, arose in dark review before him, with a maddening hate to think he was in the power of Scrowle ; and the palsyng fear of exposure, detection, and disgrace ; and when he thought of the scorn and contempt of many who knew and valued the friendship and rectitude of his late partner, and had sorrowed for the disappearance of his son ; when he thought of the triumph of many over whom, in the plenitude of his wealth and power, he had lorded it with a high hand ; when he thought of the baffled ambition to win rank ; and more than all, when he thought of the proud Katharine, the tender Violet, and the brilliant Dolly, with all their beauty, innocence, and lofty aspirations, his heart died within him at the prospect of the ruin Joab Scrowle might invoke !

If this awful story came to light, where would be his reputation in the City, on 'Change, at the Guildhall, in the Common

Council? Every finger in the mighty world of London would point to him with contempt.

His old bald head was bowed down on his hands, in the sore extreme of his fear, shame, humiliation, and exceeding misery.

Worldly to the last degree, in word, thought, and deed, Sir Jahleel Jermyn appreciated intensely the respect due to the position he had won. He was eminently a selfish man—none but a cruel, wicked, and pre-eminently selfish man would have acted as he had done to the orphan son of his late partner and early patron; and there was an awful selfishness and cowardice in the mode in which, under pressure of the crime and the circumstances in which he was involved, he now began to school himself for the intended sacrifice of his innocent daughter and her affianced lover; but self-preservation he felt to be one of the chief instincts implanted in the nature of man; and preserve himself he would, and at all hazards and risk of tears, agony, and shame in others—even his own dearest flesh and blood!

Truly the skeleton in Gresham Street had attained to gigantic proportions now!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWO DROMIOS.

DREAMING fondly with all a lover's reiterated imaginings over the recent meeting with Violet, and looking forward with passionate eagerness and impatience to the next, Douglas was seated at his desk with much of Sir Jahleel's correspondence lying unheeded before him, when a visitor was announced, and there was ushered in a tall, dark-complexioned, and dark-eyed man, with aquiline features, about thirty years of age, and so completely his own counterpart in appearance and bearing, in figure and face—even to the peculiar knit of the eyebrows—

that even Douglas, who knew him instantly, was for a moment startled.

The entire resemblance was nearly as close as his own reflection would have been in a mirror, and, rising from his seat, he greeted—with more anxiety than cordiality—his half-brother, Cospatrick—for such the visitor was—‘the double-ganger’ of whom we have heard so much.

Sholto’s coldness struck the other, who, quite unabashed thereby, held out his hand, and, quoting Shakspeare, said jauntily :

“Do you know me, sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man—am I myself?” No reply, brother Sholto! why don’t you respond, “Thou art Dromio—thou art my man—thou art thyself!”

‘Beware, Cospatrick. I have no heart for jesting with you, of all men,’ replied Sholto sadly.

‘Why, what is up now?’ said the other, seating himself.

‘I have heard of you being at Brighton. I also heard of you being at Monaco, where, among other feats, you won a thousand napoleons at the gaming table from a Captain Bramley.’

‘I have won thousands more, from many.’

‘So much the worse, Cospatrick—so much the worse.’

‘So much the better, say I. How should I be able to push along else? I don’t know your Bramley—by name at least; but I may have won from him, as I am often at Monaco.’

‘It is deuced awkward your being taken so often for *me*,’ said Sholto.

‘Well, we didn’t make ourselves, or we might have arranged things differently. I might, moreover, have been in *your* place, and you in mine,’ said Cospatrick, with a *souffçon* of bitterness in his tone. ‘May a fellow smoke here?’ he added, and lit a cigar without waiting for an answer; and then, looking round the office-like room in which he found himself, he said, ‘This is a rum game of yours, Sholto—this private secretaryship. Could something better not fall in your way?’

'Nothing fell my way,' replied Sholto gravely; 'and you know that our father could do nothing for either of us.'

'But he did for you what he never did for me.'

'And that was——'

'To marry your mother—before you were born, too!' replied Cospatrick gloomily, with the deep knit in his brow.

Sholto looked sad, yet haughty, for there was a difference in the mothers referred to. His had been a well-born yet irreproachable woman, Cospatrick's had been the reverse; so the former said, 'What is done cannot be undone—let the dead rest in peace. My mother died, in all but penury, in Rome.'

'And mine of a broken heart—the result of our father's desertion and cruelty.'

'Have you come to me only to go over all this bitterness again?'

'No, Sholto!'

'What, then, do you want, as you never come near me but for some object?'

'Money.'

'The old story—I thought so.'

'The old, old story; can you assist me—a little loan?' Sholto smiled at the phrase, and then Cospatrick Douglas laughed. 'I don't rejoice in unlimited cash,' said he; 'but I do in that which at times is nearly as good.'

'How?'

'Unlimited credit, my boy,' he replied, flicking off his cigar ash with his finger. 'Is it true that your old City cock—what's his name?—Sir Jahleel Jermyn, believes that he has a claim to the title of Torthorwald?'

'Yes.'

'And thinks to succeed?'

'I believe so.'

'It beats cock-fighting, this! Old Sir Jahleel a peer of Scotland!'

'He'd be quite as good as any other.'

'And you——'

'His son-in-law, I hope.'

The half-brothers now laughed genially for the first time.

'Torthorwald!' exclaimed Cospatrick, with theatrical emphasis; 'whilom the abode of mailed men and mediæval ladies—where the steps of the stone stairs have been hollowed by the feet of generations of mosstroopers and feudal warriors! Ah, your old City banker is like one of the frogs who wished to be bulls, or of the geese that wished to be swans, and hopes to see the mullets and crowned heart of Torthorwald quartered with his little bit of heraldry, whatever it may be.'

Then he threw himself back in his chair and laughed heartily; but his brother only sighed now; he alone knew why.

'Sly dog!' said Cospatrick, poking him in the ribs with his cane; 'snug berth you have of it, no doubt, with this old City millionaire. Which of the three girls do you affect—for I understand he has three? Have they the least idea of your little game?'

Sholto's expression lowered.

'In coming here I had, and have, no game to play,' said he.

'In your place, I would marry all the three; but I would get through the money of them all, I fear. You colour deeply, Sholto? By Jove, the matter has made some progress! You are in love with one of them?'

'I am.'

'Which? They are all dowered alike, I suppose?'

'Which matters not to you, Cospatrick.'

'You are unkind to say so, for I take an interest in my relatives, though, curious to say, I am—as pedigree-makers have it—the first of my family. Have you asked her to marry you?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I am poor.'

'In purse, but not in name. Yet you love her; what the deuce do you mean to do? You are the queerest card I ever knew, Sholto.'

'I am honourable, I hope, Cospatrick; and between us there stands on my side that "grim spectre Poverty, which scares away half the visions of love in this world."'

'Poverty with the daughter of old Jahleel Jermyn!'

'He would cut her off with the proverbial shilling—if with so much as that—if he thought——'

'Stuff, man! All this seems incomprehensible to me. Your modesty, or your timidity, is astounding. Perhaps you wish to be famous for something first; but to be that may mean being slandered by those who know and those who know you not, or those you decline to know. I have had some of that fame in my time.'

'By the way, why did you quit the Austrian cavalry?'

'Had a row with a senior officer about his wife—winged him in a duel on the ramparts—had to send in my papers and quit Vienna.'

'And since then?'

'I have been living on my wits, and the witlessness of others.'

'From bad to worse!'

'Rather.'

'Knowing your recklessness, Cospatrick, and the close resemblance we bear to each other, I have been in perpetual fear of what you might do with regard to the Jermyns.'

'Cut in and take your place with one of the girls—pass myself off for the calm, self-contained, and fascinating Sholto—eh?'

'No.'

'What then?'

'Work me some monetary mischief.'

'Come! I am not so bad as that. But what loose cash can you spare? I am deuced hard up just now.'

'I have a ten-pound note, but can ill spare it.'

'Thanks—that will do—you are the king of good fellows, Sholto—and now, ta, ta.'

'I hope you will not turn up in Brighton again.'

'Why?'

'I have friends there,' said Sholto, all unaware of the mischief already done; 'and I find that you are, as you have been elsewhere, mistaken for me——'

'For the fascinating Sholto! Nay, I must.'

'Wherefore?'

'Because I have left a little girl there who is very fond of me, and if I don't return she will cry her little heart out. So as far as she is concerned I don't mean to take a leaf out of our *pater's* book. So ta, ta, old man; you have your game to play, and I have mine.'

And, tossing the end of his cigar into a waste-paper basket, Sholto's counterpart bowed himself out and departed, whistling an air from an opera.

Now it chanced that Sir Jahleel, returning from Gresham Street, bowed down by the horror incident to his last interview with Joab Scrowle, was deposited by his handsome private brougham at the door of his mansion just as Cospatrick Douglas quitted it, and without according the slightest bow or glance of recognition, walked along the square, and disappeared at the corner of the street.

Great was the surprise of Jahleel—even in that time of utter prostration and dejection—that his private secretary, his paid dependent, should treat him thus cavalierly; but still greater was his astonishment on entering the house to find that individual quietly seated at his desk, and deep among his neglected correspondence!

Now, Sir Jahleel was not an imaginative man, and would scarcely think he had been mistaken; and he was too crushed in soul to refer just then to the wonderful resemblance; but this relation, whom we just introduced to the notice of the

reader, will serve to show that Sir Jahleel had nothing to fear from the identity of Douglas.

The real truth was that Scrowle knew not whether the boy he had so cruelly and deliberately abandoned in the streets of Rotterdam lived or died. His alleged existence and threatened production were simply the means to a selfish end—a screw—a bogus to scare Sir Jahleel and maintain a system of extortion, which he certainly now intended to carry to a terrible extreme ; and it suited him to play upon the latter's fear of Douglas until such time as he had succeeded in his newly developed matrimonial scheme, or schooled another rogue to play young Selby's part.

The merchant's anxiety was intense to know if Douglas possessed the flesh mark to which Scrowle had somewhat witlessly referred ; but short of directly questioning, he had no means of learning anything about it, and, moreover, such a mark in such a place might be quite *unknown* to the possessor of it.

Sunk in bitter and terrible thoughts, Sir Jahleel, who could commune of this cause with none, retired in misery to the seclusion of his own room.

Ere the sun set that evening Douglas, too, had cause for bitter and harassing thought, for events occur thick and fast in these railway times of ours.

The post brought him a little sealed packet, and on opening it he found therein his mother's ring—the ring he had placed in token of his troth-plight on the mystic finger of Violet's hand !

For a time he gazed at it like one in a trance. Why and how was it returned to him thus, without a single written word of explanation—abruptly, coldly, and contemptuously ? Had Violet told Kate of the secret engagement ? and had the latter achieved the abstraction of the trinket to return it deliberately in that fashion ? It almost seemed so, as the address was *not* in the handwriting of Violet Jermyn.

Had she—infirm of purpose—changed her mind since that

brief but delicious meeting she had herself accorded him, or been compelled to change it apparently, and under some strange pressure or hallucination accepted Sir Harry Honeywood after all ?

To Douglas, these and other harrowing surmises occurred in quick succession and reiteration. Proof of nothing had he but the little ring that lay before him, and seemed to have a strange fascination for him.

He had no means of elucidating this mystery—of getting replies to the questions and surmises that occurred to him ; and so hour followed hour, and eventually day followed day, leaving him in mental torture, wonder, and anxiety.

And ever and anon, he asked himself, should he go to Brighton on the appointed day, in the craving hope to meet her once again ?

CHAPTER XIX.

SIR JAHLEEL GOES HOME.

DOUGLAS deemed it strange now that Sir Jahleel, though they were the only occupants of the great house (the servants excepted), avoided him ; that for two or three days subsequent to his return to London he seemed also to avoid his club. He secluded himself in his own room, denied himself to all visitors, for with his corroding thoughts society sickened him.

The sounds in the street, the children's voices in the gardens, the organs and so forth, all jarred upon his ear, and he cursed the people who passed to and fro, so heedless, as it seemed to him, of thought or care, and he cursed the very sunshine of day.

He had cast the die—the die of Dolly's fate ! Joab Scrowle was formally invited to visit his family—the very day of his arrival was named ; and with a heart sick and heavy as lead he

set out for his magnificent country house, Barons Hall, to meet, as best he might, the coming domestic catastrophe.

He contrived to arrive in the twilight of evening, as if ashamed that his face should be looked upon. Thus the manifest change in his appearance was unseen or unnoticed by Kate, who joyfully proceeded at once to give him what she deemed good and welcome news—details of the boat scene with Douglas and a girl near Brighton Pier—how Violet had been cognisant of the whole affair, and had admitted her tender interest in that artful intriguer, but had ‘thrown him over for ever ; so no doubt Sir Harry would have a fair prospect of success now.’

Oppressed though he was by thought to a degree beyond the comprehension of his eldest daughter, he could not hear this without some interest, but knew on a comparison of dates that the person Violet saw, could not have been his secretary, but most probably that other person, whose resemblance so startled him—doubtless the ‘double-ganger’ of whom they had heard so much.

He mentioned this to Kate, on which her countenance fell, and an angry expression came into her proud eyes. Anon she struck her white hands together, and said :

‘Never mind, papa, *who* the person was so long as Violet remains assured he was Sholto Douglas ; let us keep our own counsel, and so make the most of the entire situation,’ she added relentlessly.

‘Where is Violet just now?’

‘In her own room—she has spent much of her time there lately.’

‘And Dolly?’ he asked, in a strange voice all unlike his own.

‘With Vincent Sheldon at lawn-tennis ; but the light must be failing them now.’

‘Any letters for me?’

‘Some, in the library—and now, papa, do dress for dinner ;’ and Kate tripped up the stately staircase, while her father, in

the hope to be alone for a few moments, entered the now half-darkened library, and seated himself at the table, heedless of the letters he had affected to ask for.

Then Dolly came suddenly upon him, at a time when his head was flung upon the table, his hands clasped above it, and he was moaning in great mental agony.

She trembled and stood still on beholding emotion so unwonted in him.

'Papa,' said she softly, winding her tender arms caressingly round his neck, and laying her delicate cheek on his bald head, 'dearest papa, are you unwell?—what has occurred? Papa! papa, how pale you seem. Won't you speak to Dolly?'

'A giddiness, my pet, that was all—only a giddiness,' said he, with a strange laugh, that was no laugh at all, but very chilling to hear. 'You are a dear little coax and humbug, Dolly,' he added, as again she flung her soft arms round his neck in an impulsive way that was all her own, and glued her pouting lips to his withered cheek. 'Please don't strangle your poor old dad,' said he, with a sob-like sigh, as he thought of the miserable tidings he had in store for this warm-hearted and bright little creature.

'Dear old *pater*, what has occurred in the City? Has the Bank of England failed, or what?' she asked, kissing him on the other cheek and nestling her face in his neck, all of which demonstrations innocently added to the agony the wretched man was enduring.

Dolly observed that his hands were trembling as he caressed her in turn, and dim though the twilight, she could see that he looked haggard, grey, and unusually pale and wan.

'Oh, papa, do speak! Tell *me*—what has happened? You look so very strange!' she said piteously.

'Things you don't understand—business worries—Gresham Street—that have proved rather too much for me; but don't alarm yourself or your sisters. Tell Tapleigh to send me some iced soda-brandy, and I shall meet you at dinner, pet Dolly.'

She left him reluctantly, and the moment the door closed his head and arms were again flung on the table, and he felt the blindness of sheer desperation upon him.

Merciful Heaven ! was that which he knew was coming to be the fate of his bright little Dolly—Dolly, who was a woman in the charming roundness of her outline, in her maturity and symmetry of form ; but a girl in her *espieglerie* of manner, her innocent trustfulness, and in the child-like sweetness of her soft dimples and laughing bright hazel eyes !

* * * * *

Again and again did Violet see him whom she supposed—nay, never doubted—to be Sholto Douglas, with the golden-haired girl in the public places of Brighton, till finally they disappeared, and together ; and then she came more than ever to the conclusion that her wisest—indeed her only—plan was, if possible, to banish him from her mind, and cease to mourn and surmise in secret, and this, Kate thought, was the time to bring Sir Harry once more on the *tapis*, by referring to him occasionally in a casual manner.

‘I am sure, Violet,’ said she, placing an arm round her sister’s neck one day in a caressing mode to her unusual ; ‘I am sure, from what you told me, that Sir Harry pleaded his passion eloquently ?’

‘I don’t know that,’ she replied ; ‘but what does George Sand say of such pleading ?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘That the man who pleads eloquently is only half in love.’

‘Rejection, by exciting pique, may make him wholly so. I have invited Sir Harry to our great dinner-party.’

‘Oh, Kate !—how awkward—how could you ?’ exclaimed Violet, blushing deeply, and with vexation ; ‘how very awkward !’

‘For him ?’

‘No—for me ; but I’ll have a headache, and keep my room.’

‘No, you won’t,’ said Kate, kissing her ; and then, for the time, the matter ended.

And so Sir Harry had accepted the invitation, and was coming, doubtless, with hope renewed !

Meanwhile Douglas was still enduring a time of miserable doubt and perplexity.

They were to have met at the Maze on an evening as appointed, and in the desperate hope that she might be there after all, and afford him some clue or explanation for rejecting him, of which the returned engagement ring was a sufficient token, he took his way at the proper time, passing through the grounds cautiously and with as much concealment as if he had been a personage in quest of Mr. Tapleigh's plate-basket, rather than a lover going to a rendezvous.

In the wild and tumultuous hope that she might reaccept it, he had brought with him the engagement ring—to him a hallowed trinket ; and as he looked on it memory went back to the time when he drew it slowly and tenderly from the hand of his mother, when amid the curious mixture of penury and splendour, she lay dead in the great room of a dilapidated palace at Rome, when it was sunset on the Pincio, and the sky beyond St. Peter's was all purple and gold, against which the green lines of the distant hills were growing black, and Roman shadows, and Roman moonlight, stole swiftly on.

All the details of that hour of sorrow and bereavement came strongly and vividly to his memory, he knew not why, on this particular evening.

He sought the trysting-place with an anxious heart and eager, searching eyes. She was not there ; in vain did he wander through the dark green mazes of the ingenious gardener's labyrinth, and utter her name more than once in nervous expectancy of a response.

How empty, silent, and voiceless the place seemed, and yet so full of her presence, and the memory of those tender utterances, protestations and promises ; and, more than all, those pressures of the hand and the kisses, which might be bestowed on another ere long—a maddening thought.

Was it indeed all over, and thus abruptly, and never to be again, this love story—this idyll, the first delicious one the lonely Douglas had felt in all his life? He felt, too, that to him *another* never would, and never could, come again.

How little could he suppose that every thought and pang of his was shared in by Violet to the full, with the added stings of mortification, shown for her folly in loving him, and utter mistrust in himself!

Slowly, sadly, and at times furious in thought, he turned on his homeward way—backward, rather, for London was not, and never would be, to him, *home*!

Suddenly he stood still, and uplifted his eyes and clenched hands, as a thought flashed upon him.

Could it be that in some manner his erratic half-brother, of whose whereabouts he was ignorant, had been mistaken for him?

‘If so, my evil genius has ruined me at last!’ he exclaimed aloud; ‘but where or how to trace him; and oh, how to explain all this to *her*!’

CHAPTER XX.

VINCENT SHELDON’S RIVAL.

THOUGH Miss Jermyn, who was not very sympathetic by nature, was busy with her intended dinner-party and other gaieties generally, while Violet was full of her own thoughts, and Dolly was ever busy with Vincent Sheldon (a happy, heedless young fellow, quite suited to her), and the arrangements for their wedding, which was to take place on the return of the family to town—all the three sisters could not but perceive that their father, usually a grave and not very genial man, was a changed, moody, and melancholy one now.

Nothing roused him—not even Kate’s prognostications of the coming Scotch title, and the bright future it would bring them all—the title of Torthorwald.

It was not the loss to his youngest daughter of the solid wealth that old Mr. Sheldon could bestow on Vincent that Sir Jahleel regretted; he had enough of his own to bestow upon her; it was the horror of the sacrifice he was to make of *her*, to save himself from ruin and disgrace, when, by a little prussic acid, or a slash by a razor, he might end the misery, so far as he personally was concerned.

Yet, he thought again, if Selby's heir existed, or a tutored personator of him—Joab Scrowle—even were he (Sir Jahleel) dead—might make capital out of the original crime; for though Scrowle was an active participator in it, he might give some colourable account, even in a court of law, as to how the boy was committed to his care, and lost by him in Rotterdam.

In his then craven mood of mind, Sir Jahleel dared not as yet break off the engagement between Dolly and Vincent Sheldon. He had no pretext for it, and never would find one. Thus he sought to temporise with fate and himself, in the desperate hope that something—he could not conceive precisely what—might turn up and save them all yet.

Thus, in a timid, quavering, and hen-hearted way, he announced one day at luncheon, after he had fortified himself with a glass of wine, that a 'friend, an old business correspondent, is coming to Barons Hall in a day or two to spend a few weeks with us.'

'So glad to see any old friend of yours, papa,' said Kate; 'and we shall do all in our power to make him happy.'

'Thank you, darlings.'

'Is he old or young, papa?' asked Dolly, who had a deeper interest in the matter than she wotted of.

'Well—ah, middle-aged,' said Sir Jahleel, with a little sound like a groan.

'A travelled man, of course?' said Kate.

'Yes; seen much of the world, certainly.'

'What is his name?'

'Scrowle.'

'Scrowle !' exclaimed Kate.

'A City man—Mr. Joab Scrowle,' emphasised Sir Jahleel bitterly.

Dolly laughed excessively at the sound of it, and asked if there was a Mrs. Joab Scrowle.

Sir Jahleel groaned in spirit, and, strange to say, it had never occurred to him, in the utter perplexity of his soul, to inquire whether his tormentor had such an appendage as a wife ; but, sooth to say, Scrowle did not seem much like a married man. And now Dolly changed the subject by opening a case, and displaying a magnificent suite of diamond ornaments—necklet and locket, earrings and bracelets—nestling in bright blue velvet, a gift from old Mr. Sheldon, to wear first on her marriage-day ; and Sir Jahleel, in secret, looked at them as if she had opened a nest of adders.

Preoccupied as his daughters were with their own affairs, they could not fail, as we have said, to perceive something strange in his manner and bearing, while his occasional remarks became a source of speculation that was sometimes sorrowful.

The merriment of bright, happy Dolly—a sensitive, tender, and thoughtless girl, yet with an abundant store of faith, hope, and charity in her heart—seemed peculiarly to jar upon his temperament now.

'Do not laugh thus, my dear !' he said to her on one occasion.

'Why, papa ?' she asked with surprise.

'Because life is a serious, an earnest thing, Dolly.'

'Life ?'

'Yes, child.'

'Of course. Mr. Octave Bede tells us every day—every Sunday, I mean—that we must die, and all that sort of thing, but I don't mean to die yet, papa, or leave you and Vincent ; so why should I mope or moan about a remote contingency ?'

don, with whom, on being introduced, he shook hands cordially enough, even condescendingly, saying :

‘ Glad to meet you ; how are you, my kiddie ?’

‘ Miss Jermyn,’ said Sir Harry Honeywood, whose light-blue eyes were twinkling with amusement, ‘ who is that queer-looking fellow ?’

‘ A friend of papa’s private secretary—of Mr. Douglas ?’ replied poor Kate in her desperation.

‘ A friend of Douglas’s ? Oh, impossible, surely ?’ was the curious, and, as Kate thought, not very polite response ; but then Honeywood had long been a friend and kind of privileged dangler.

‘ Dolly seems rather too much taken up with that fellow Sheldon, Sir Jahleel,’ said Scrowle, in a growling whisper, when his unhappy host drew him aside from the rest of the guests ; ‘ so much so, that I have a good mind to chuck her up for one of her sisters ; only that Violet—that is her name, is it not ?—seems too sad and quiet, and Kate is so infernally proud and haughty ; but I could tame her down a bit. Oh, after all, it must be Dolly that shall change her name to Scrowle.’

As Sir Jahleel listened to these remarks, which, with reference to his daughters, sounded to him like coarsest ribaldry, his blood seemed to become alternately burning hot and icy cold, and he had to turn away to conceal the terrible expression which he felt come into his face, with the longing to rush at Scrowle’s short bull-like neck, and strangle him where he stood !

The latter was introduced to no stranger—an omission in courtesy which he viewed with profound philosophy, and after he gathered courage he talked away to whoever was near him, and whether they replied by a word briefly, or merely by a bewildered stare, seemed all the same to him.

Kate looked around upon the dowagers who were present, and then upon their daughters, in sore and bitter perplexity as to whom she might request him to escort to the dinner-table ;

but he cut short her difficulty by pouncing upon Dolly, and appropriating her as his own peculiar property, somewhat to the girl's own bewilderment and amusement.

With something between a laugh and a grimace, Vincent Sheldon whispered as he withdrew from her side, and approached some one else :

'And now, Dolly, "to dinner with what appetite you may."'

'I think, Miss Dolly, I have put *his* pipe out already,' said Scrowle, pulling up his shirt-collar.

'Sir—Vincent is not smoking,' replied poor Dolly, as ignorant of Scrowle's phraseology as of the great mischief that was so soon to ensue.

'Do you admire pictures, Mr. Scrowle?' said she, after a pause ; 'papa has a few very fine old ones.'

'Pictures ! Ah, Wardour Street is a wonderful place for picking up them kind of rubbish.'

'That is a Peter van Laer Bamboccio,' said Dolly.

'Peter Bumboatsio—oh, don't think much of *him* !'

'Papa paid a hundred for it.'

'I'd have taken it for a signboard—wonderful ! and all this here, in the cabinet—is what you call a brickbat collection, I think ?'

'*Bric-à-brac*, Mr. Scrowle,' said Dolly, laughing immoderately behind her fan.

'Ain't it all the same, my dear ?'

Dolly rather shrunk at this address, and then thought it might be a fatherly way he had.

And now, to the relief of the Jermyn family, the gong was heard to boom in the hall below, and the guests filed downstairs. Violet was allotted to Tom Tandem, the sporting major of the Hussars, while Kate felt it incumbent upon her to take the arm of the curate, Mr. Octave Paschal Bede, and make him tremulously happy for the time.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WONDER GROWS.

As the dinner proceeded in slow and stately gradation of courses like any other of its kind, the silence, abstraction, and constraint of Sir Jahleel (caused by the oppressive presence of his 'skeleton') were apparent enough to those who sat near him; and Violet, while listening to the platitudes and horsey talk of the cavalry major, was oppressively sensible of the presence of Sir Harry Honeywood, and knew that his eyes wandered towards her ever and anon; and while full of bitter mortification at the conduct of Douglas, she was aware, also, of feeling less of gratitude than of anger, that Kate should have invited the rejected suitor, thus creating to her so much of 'a situation;' so the major found her rather *distrain* and silent.

Ignorant of Scrowle's character, and, as yet, blessedly so of his designs regarding herself, and of her father's terror and victimisation, Dolly, while sharing much in the surprise of Kate and Violet, laughed excessively at their strange guest as 'a funny man,' for so she termed him, until his attention began to wax, as she thought, too absurd, and his oglings, broad speeches, and occasional squeezing of the hand, began to scare her; but she attributed them to the wine he was taking.

But this was only after a time, as at first he was rather crushed by the state that surrounded him, and failing to get up an appetite, ate little; but his predilection for all kinds of fluids remained, and he partook of everything down to the maraschino, which he eulogised as 'a special drain of comfort—cream of the valley.'

Scrowle's behaviour at table—all unconscious as he was of it—scared more than Dolly. He ate peas with his knife, drank with his mouth full out of his finger-glass, too, when dessert

came, made fearful faces when the wine went round, and partook of salted olives, supposing them to be raw fruit, talked obtrusively to everyone on everything, and took his full share and more in all conversation, whether he understood its range or not.

The Hussars, with elevated eyebrows, looked at Scrowle with amazement, Sir Harry focussed him with his eye-glass, and could only conceive that he was tolerated there because he was some wealthy though underbred relation with whom it might be impolitic to quarrel; but greater grew their wonder when he enforced some of his remarks occasionally by knocking the side of his red nose thrice with a finger, and slapping his cheek with the palm of his hand.

Thus, after being half-suffocated with laughter—which Scrowle attributed to the charms of his own conversational powers—Dolly became, like her now silent sisters, crimsoned with shame and dismay, as a chill seemed to fall on all, even the Hussars, who were wont to make a jest of everything, and to take everything to a certain degree in a happy-go-lucky way; but would have astounding anecdotes to relate at mess to-morrow evening of this remarkable person, who, after the ladies retired to the drawing-room, drew his chair close by that of Honeywood, whom he slapped on the back, calling him ‘a tip-top out-and-outer,’ and then applied himself to the wine decanters with greater zeal than ever.

While all this was in progress Vincent Sheldon’s eye wandered from time to time to the face of Sir Jahleel, in which he read—familiar as he was with its features—an expression of secret wretchedness that puzzled him, but instinctively he connected it with the untoward advent of Joab Scrowle.

Unconscious of all that was *in petto*, but with dim foreshadowing, he knew not of what, on seeing the expression referred to in the face of his future father-in-law, Vincent, aided by Bramley and Major Tandem, when Honeywood and others joined the ladies, prevailed upon Scrowle to proceed to the

smoking-room, which was much more to that individual's taste, and there brandy and soda-water, pipes and cigars, were supplied *ad libitum*; and, lounging on a luxurious divan, Mr. Joab Scrowle proceeded to 'blow a cloud' as he called it, and felt himself really in his glory, and on hearing Major Tandem ask Bramley whether he had entered a certain horse to run at Epsom, he said :

'Epsom—do you fellows go there?'

'At times, of course,' exclaimed Captain Bramley; 'don't you?'

'Not if I know it! I was there once, and never mean to go again.'

'Why? You put a pot of money on some screw, and lost, I suppose?'

'Yes, I lost; but it was through playing with the thimble-and-pea-table coves.'

'Ah! this is interesting,' said Bramley, with much gravity; 'how did your mischance come to pass?'

'Simply enough, for I was precious green then! I saw a genuine-looking yokel in a smock-frock playing along with them, and winning like fun, and he whispered to me on the sly, while the man's head was turned away, and as he lifted the thimble :

"Do you see the pea?"

"Of course I do," said I.

"Well—go me halves, betting a fiver, it is under that one."

"All right," said I, and put a new Bank of England note by the side of the simple-looking countryman's stake. He took up the thimble again, but whew! the bird was flown, and there was no pea where I had seen it a moment before! So both the notes were collared.

"This is clear theft—a regular plant!" said I. "Will you help me to whip these fellows?"

"Certainly I will," replied the yokel; so I pulled off my coat, and was squaring away at the fellow with the table, when I was knocked down from behind by the yokel, who picked

my pockets, gave me a final smash on the head, and when I recovered my senses the gang had disappeared, so I thought, blow me if ever again I venture to Epsom.'

This commonplace anecdote, which Scrowle related in a vulgar way peculiarly his own, giving it point once or twice by placing a finger to his nose, was followed by others of a coarser nature, to arrest which, Bramley, who was really a good-natured fellow, and saw that shame oppressed his host, volunteered a song, of which a verse may suffice :—

'All Melton the fox over pastures may follow !
 All London may ride in the road with the stag !
 All Brighton hunt hare—up hill and down hollow—
 But give me the devil's delight of the DRAG !
 Then give me a clipper in tip-top condition—
 To lick any luxury, this I will back,
 For twenty short minutes the pride of position
 Of first in the field with the garrison pack !'

Bramley had a fine mellow voice, and sang well ; but the result of his song was to make matters worse, for Scrowle, who was now three-parts intoxicated, insisted on favouring the company also with a ditty, which, as Tandem whispered to Sheldon, 'was of a nature quite too awful,' and of which the refrain ran thus—

'The captain as was our commander,
 The boatswain and all the ship's crew,
 But little they cared for the hardships
 That all we poor convicts went through.'

And with the last line of each refrain his blood-shot eyes settled with a mingled expression of malevolence and comicality on the shrinking Sir Jahleel, while Vincent Sheldon and the Hussars, ignorant of what was passing in the minds of both, were choked with laughter, though surprise and contempt were blended with their amusement.

He crowed like a cock, imitated the frying of beefsteaks, tried to get up a quarrel with Vincent Sheldon (of whom eventually he saw *two*), but a glance of entreaty from Sir Jahleel quelled them both, while the latter's misery deepened.

At last Scrowle went to sleep in a corner of the smoking room, to the great relief of all.

So the day—or rather the evening—of the dinner passed over, and after the last of their wondering guests had departed, in the solitude of her own room, the proud Kate fairly wept with vexation as she thought of the outrage put upon them all by the introduction of Scrowle ; but still more was her vexation increased when she found on the following day that her father was mysteriously immovable and impenetrable on the subject of his business connections with that personage, and the great necessity that seemed to exist for keeping on more than friendly terms with him.

The horror of having this man's presence—this odious Frankenstein—in his household, apart from the awful sacrifice of poor Dolly's happiness and love, already impending, was beyond all description intense with Sir Jahleel ; but the die was cast, and he had but to play out the cowardly game even to the bitter end.

Scrowle knew and felt his power, and often made curious and mysterious references to 'Rotterdam,' as being a familiar and favourite place of his ; and he always grinned with intense and malignant satisfaction when he saw how the slightest of these references made Sir Jahleel wince and change colour—even shiver at times ; and though he knew it not, Scrowle was artfully working on his fears regarding Douglas, and meant to do so, till such time as he—Scrowle—had achieved his own nefarious ends.

Sir Jahleel feared the tongue of Scrowle when loosed by wine, and he feared his diabolical temper when inflamed by it, and hourly he expected to find a catastrophe precipitated by his bearing to Vincent Sheldon, and more than all to Dolly.

He was the skeleton—the dark shadow in the house ! When conversing with visitors, who viewed him with wonder and repugnance, if his eye met that of Sir Jahleel the latter shuddered, lest he might be making some rash revelation, especially if the

person with whom he conversed was unfriendly or a business rival.

'Deal gently with us,' Sir Jahleel found himself humiliated and terrified enough to say piteously, 'with her—my child, Dolly, more than all. Scrowle, have you any pity?'

'None—for you at least—you live on the fat of the land; why shouldn't I share it?'

'For her, at least?' urged the wretched father.

'My pity for her takes another form—for my eye! ain't she a stunner? Besides, I ain't so bad looking as that comes to, and have more knowledge of life and the world in any hair of my head than that snob, young Sheldon, has in his whole body!'

And he certainly had, but of a life of infamy and a world peculiarly his own.

Dolly had, we say, at first laughed at Scrowle, and perhaps thought him half-witted. Then she became alarmed, disgusted, and finally felt enraged and insulted, by finding that he followed her like a shadow in the house, the lawn, and the gardens, with curious pertinacity.

The three Hussars, dropping in by chance a day or two after the dinner-party, were surprised to find Scrowle still there; but, save Honeywood, they viewed this intercourse with Barons Hall as simply an affair *pro tem.*, till they marched to Hounslow or elsewhere. The house was an open one, easy of access, the *cuisine* was excellent, the cellar unexceptionable; more than all, the three girls were handsome—yea, more than handsome—and 'a lot' of the folks they met there were such as they thought they could talk with, chaff with, and flirt with, and enjoy a pleasant scamper over the downs; but this astounding Joab Scrowle was altogether out of their calculation.

'What the dooce did it mean?' surmised Major Tandem; 'but it was all something no fellow could understand.'

With this outrageous ogre in the house, 'what was to be done?' thought Kate. 'Society must be given up—they would neither move in it, nor have it about them; and whatever was to be

done must be done quickly,' she added, as her haughty pride flared up in revolt.

But now, what was the dread power this blustering red-nosed fiend had over their father, the once busy, bustling, confident and self-asserting City man, that he trembled in his presence, eyeing him with hate and horror, when he could do so furtively or unseen, and speaking of him with loathing at all times !

What was this hidden mystery which Sir Jahleel dared not reveal even to his own children, for that some such thing existed was painfully apparent to Violet as well as Kate ? When was the power to do evil and excite terror won ? Where and how ? In tiresome iteration the questions came again and again, and remained unanswered.

The sisters strove to seclude Scrowle from visitors ; but that irrepressible individual would *not* be secluded, and he rambled all over the great mansion, from Kate's own boudoir to the places he liked best of all, the butler's pantry and the smoking-room, where he had ever an unlimited quantity of brandies and sodas, and ere long he began to speak in familiar terms to all the sisters alike.

'Do you belong to a club, or what, my dear ?' he asked Violet, on whose jacket were some remarkable buttons.

'Yes,' she replied curtly.

'What club ?'

'The A. B. C.,' said she, with a curl of her lip.

'What is that—a spelling bee ?'

'No—the Archery, Badminton, and Croquet Club.'

'You are a rum un—you are !' he responded admiringly, and was about to pinch her chin, when the light that flashed in her eyes, and the expression that came into her usually soft face, quelled even him, bully and household tyrant though he was.

'Can this man be a relative of whose existence we have been kept ignorant ?' surmised Violet.

'No—I should think not,' said Dolly ; 'but what makes you think so ?'

'He is so peculiar in his manner to you.'

'That is because I used to laugh so at him, the funny old toad; but Vincent is losing patience fast, and will say something sharp to him, I fear.'

'Why does not papa do so?'

But Sir Jahleel had sustained such a shock that at times the great amount of energy and vitality that he possessed, together with the great and almost overweening confidence born of opulent success, seemed to have nearly passed away.

His mind was dead to everything but shame for the manner in which his own children, his friends, and the Sheldons must view the sorrow that was to come on Dolly, and rage at and horror of Joab Scrowle—emotions so keen and deep that they made him feel that to slay that personage would be but a slight matter now, and a relief to his agonised soul.

Scrowle saw and read all this in his face as in the pages of a book, and he laughed in his heart with fiendish exultation that he had the secret power to wring, crush, and terrify the soul of one so wealthy, so pampered—yea, and so hard-hearted as the City knight was by nature.

The advent of Scrowle had the effect of considerably loosening the reins of Sir Jahleel's authority, influence, and worth in his own household, and more than astounded even the denizens of the servants' hall.

Scrowle had addressed the solemn footmen as 'flunkies,' and openly spoke of them as 'guys with plush pants and cauliflower heads.' He had told Mr. Tapleigh, that most respectable of family butlers, that he 'was an old prig, and one of a set of evil, idle, good-for-nothing locusts;' so—save Mademoiselle Ricochette, with whom he did not interfere—all gave a month's notice, even to Mrs. Jellybagg, who did so with tears in her eyes, as she thought of her comfortable rooms and ample perquisites. After a time, however, she and Mr. Tapleigh thought better of it, and remained. But before these changes took place in Barons Hall the catastrophe which Sir

Jahleel knew must inevitably come had taken place with regard to Dolly and Vincent Sheldon—a catastrophe so bewildering that for a time it absorbed all Violet's sorrow and regret for what she deemed her own love *fiasco*.

CHAPTER XXII.

'BIS DAT QUI CITO DAT.'

FROM occasional meetings on the Marine Parade or at the Pavilion, and when with an occasional riding-party, it seemed quite evident to Kate Jermyn that, whether Violet had forgotten Douglas and his supposed falsehood or had not done so, Sir Harry Honeywood again hoped to propose for her, and with success, on the first eligible opportunity, as he knew of no rival, nor had fear of any; and with this hope before her, the continued residence of Joab Scrowle at Barons Hall became more intolerable than ever to Kate, who, with her father, still kept her resolution of leaving Violet in a state of deception.

Of Douglas she heard nothing. She only knew that her father still retained him in his service, and would probably do so till the party returned to town, when she fully hoped he would receive his *congé*.

Meantime Scrowle made himself perfectly at home in Barons Hall, and indulged to the full his taste for strong liquors, short pipes, and strong rank pigtail tobacco; but he began to think that now 'it was high time something was done in his own affairs, and that Sir Jahleel should give young Sheldon the sack, and be pretty quick about it.'

Attended by a groom, Kate and Violet had gone for a ride on the Lewes road—Kate generally contrived to take the latter in that direction. It led to the cavalry barracks. Sir Jahleel was at the desk in his writing-room, and Dolly had gone forth to meet Vincent Sheldon, who had been in town, and was to return by an afternoon train; and, as she strolled slowly through

the shrubberies, towards the walk that led across the sun-lighted lawn to the labyrinth, full of her own thoughts, and the anticipation of meeting her lover, she was quite unconscious of being followed by Scrowle, on matrimonial thoughts intent.

Joab had on that afternoon resolved 'to put it to the touch, to win or lose it all !'

He puffed out his long-fingered kid gloves by blowing into them, and then drew them on. His hat was rakishly set on one side of his head, his short pipe was deposited in his waistcoat pocket, and, as he approached Dolly suddenly, there was a leer in his eyes that made her laugh, provoked though she was by his unexpected appearance at such a place and time ; and, encouraged by the laugh, Scrowle, who had been, as usual, admiring her little round form, the delicacy of her neck, the golden masses of her hair, and her general air of girlish grace, with all its bloom and beauty, proceeded at once to pay her some extravagant compliments in a blunt and straightforward fashion peculiarly his own.

She snatched her hand away, and said, with a saucy little laugh :

'Don't, please, Mr. Scrowle, or people may think we are flirting.'

'Flirting ; what is that ?'

'Playing at love-making, Mr. Scrowle.'

'Oh, but you and I must not play at it.'

'Of course.'

'Because I mean to make it in earnest,' said Scrowle, making a vigorous attempt, but vainly, to recapture Dolly's quick little hand.

Whether Mr. Scrowle had been in Mr. Tapleigh's pantry recently, or in the smoking-room, where he could always help himself, we know not ; but he evidently thought the opportunity a good one for doing something in furtherance of his suit, and of ousting Vincent Sheldon. She endeavoured to pass him, but he stood right in the path, barring her way back to the house, which was at some distance.

'You heard what I said?' he added, with what he meant to be a very lover-like ogle.

'Yes, but fail to understand you,' replied the girl, feeling perplexed and annoyed.

'Surely I spoke the Queen's English plain enough.'

'Perhaps.'

Dolly held herself very erect now ; was Scrowle tipsy ?

'More than once have I given you hints, Dolly.'

'Oh, he certainly is !' thought she.

'Hints of what ?' she asked sharply ; 'I detest hints, Mr. Scrowle.'

'Won't you call me Joab ?' he asked coaxingly ; 'my head is screwed on the right way ; my heart is in the right place, and all right as a trivet.'

'Well, Joab Scrowle, to the point ?'

'You are to marry me, Dolly Jermyn, you know, that is all. I had arranged it all with the governor long before I came here ; so the sooner it's settled, the banns up, the old bloke Bede sent for, and all that sort of thing, the better.'

Dolly was alarmed now, for to this strange speech he added much ogling, a mysterious rolling of his eyes, a contortion of his hideous visage, and licking his lips with a very red tongue—quite as red indeed as his nose.

'You are mad or intoxicated, sir !' said Dolly, in great dismay.

'I am neither one nor other, so let us kiss and be friends. People know each other all the better after a kiss or two.'

Dolly uttered a scream, as he made a decided rush at her, with extended arms, but just at that moment Vincent Sheldon, who in a tweed suit and wideawake had been approaching them unheard on the soft grass, threw away his cigar, and by one blow made Scrowle measure his length on the ground.

Gathering himself up, the latter uttered a strange cry—an absolute scream of rage and spite ; his bloodshot eyes glared with fury ; his face seemed to grow paler—his nose more scarlet ; he bit his nether lip ; thrust his hat firmly on his head,

and was rushing with all the fury of a mad bull at Sheldon, who by one steady facer, hit straight from the shoulder, stretched him again, but senseless this time, on the sod.

Vincent, who had secretly resented Scrowle's impudent and offhand bearing to Dolly for some time past, now put an arm round her, and kissing her tenderly, said :

'Dolly, darling, what does all this mean—is this extraordinary brute tipsy ?'

'I fear so,' she replied, greatly agitated ; 'but I hope you have not hurt him.'

'I rather think I have tamed him—but he is all right—he is coming-to already—let us leave him to pick himself up as best he may.'

And just as Scrowle began to rise slowly and giddily from the ground, Vincent led the agitated girl away to the house, whither her new suitor followed them, intent on vengeance and seeking Sir Jahleel face to face.

The latter, on learning what had occurred, was convulsed with sheer terror of what Scrowle in his rage and spite might do or say. The thunder-cloud that had so long hung over him had burst at last ! He knew it would come to this, unless something unforeseen 'turned up,' but nothing had done so, to change his Dolly's fate.

Sir Jahleel's life had been a prosaic and matter-of-fact one ; his chief excitements had been business speculations or Stock Exchange work—always successful in the end—since that night when Selby's son and heir disappeared ; and now—now, he was in the midst of a domestic tragedy !

He felt that he must perforce redeem his pledge to Scrowle, as the price of that wretch's silence ; so, while the latter, breathing dreadful threats, betook him to the company he would find in the smoking-room, with a promise from Sir Jahleel that he 'would arrange matters finally *now*' ; the latter turned to Vincent, and with an ill-affected severity of manner, said :

'Vincent Sheldon, you have grossly assaulted a valued

guest ; thus he and you can no longer remain under the same roof.'

'I am right glad to hear it, sir ; this fellow,' replied Vincent, 'has been here too long already, and his outrageous conduct has culminated in his insolence to Dolly.'

'It is you, not he, that must quit Barons Hall.'

'Why?' asked Vincent, thunderstruck.

'Mr. Scrowle,' replied Sir Jahleel, in a strange, hollow, and sepulchral voice, 'is a suitor for the hand of Dolly, and all must end now between her and you, Vincent.'

The latter seemed incapable of taking in the sense of this amazing information, which Sir Jahleel had to repeat thrice, ere rage and grief began to darken the expression of the young man's face, together with a look of the deepest dismay.

'You cannot be in earnest,' said he, with a lofty bearing and very uncertain voice ; 'you must be tipsy or—or, or—oh, my God, can your senses have left you?'

'I would that they had—I would that they had!' said the other, with the most profound melancholy. 'I am in earnest, and no wine has passed my lips this day, Vincent. I shall acquaint you and your family of this matter more formally. Leave Barons Hall you must, and without addressing Dolly again. Meanwhile, go to your own room. Good-bye.'

He held forth his hand, but Vincent, who believed that a sudden madness had seized Sir Jahleel, notwithstanding the intense gravity of his manner, stood silent, rooted to the spot, and so stunned by this new turn of affairs as to be incapable of speech or action.

But Sir Jahleel, who felt that the worst was yet to come, now went in search of Dolly, and meeting her opportunely, he took her by the hand, and leading her into his own peculiar sanctum, his writing-room, closed the door, and much to her surprise locked it.

He then cast himself gasping into his chair, covering his eyes with his hands, and not daring to look Dolly in the face.

Though in great alarm at emotion so excessive and so unusual in him, she wound her arms round his neck, laid her soft cheek on his bald head, and implored him in the most endearing terms to tell her what distressed him.

After all his deep ponderings it had come to this ! Himself, he felt, he could not sacrifice ; his mind had long been made up for that. Dolly alone could serve him, and Dolly must be the victim. With all the deep devotion with which he loved her, by some strange inversion of the mind there had come times now, when he thought he loved less the girl he meant to wrong and sacrifice upon the shrine of self.

Feeling that the sooner she knew her fate the better for all, in a strange and more broken voice than when addressing Vincent, he told her briefly that she must cease to think more of the latter, and prepare herself to become the wife of—Joab Scrowle !

As he had done to Vincent, he had to repeat this sentence of death thrice to Dolly ere she could interpret it ; and when she did so, a deep groan burst from him, when he saw the face of the more than astounded girl changed from its rare beauty into sudden horror, her quivering lips half open and pale as her cheek ; her teeth set hard, and her eyes fixed, with a fearful expression in them.

Like Vincent, she thought a delirium had suddenly seized him.

'You are ill, papa,' said she ; 'let me summon some one,' she urged, starting towards the bell ; but almost rudely he clutched her tender arm and arrested the action. Then his manner changed, and he said, while weeping :

'I am not well—at heart, I mean—but I may be better presently. Kiss me, darling, kiss your poor old father, and forgive him, if you can, the misery he is working you and poor Vincent Sheldon.'

The sight of her father's tears—an awful and unusual sight to her—harrowed the girl's heart. She embraced him tenderly, and he became more composed.

'You understand me,' said he, after a pause, 'that you cannot marry Vincent Sheldon?'

'Not marry Vincent, papa, when all arrangements have been made—our engagement public—the very time named!' she exclaimed, with a torrent of tears; 'what has poor Vincent done?'

'Nothing, nothing,' he replied, avoiding her eyes; 'but I have promised—you—been compelled to promise you—to another.'

'What other?' she asked passionately, forgetting what he had already told her; 'and to whom have you promised me?'

'Listen. If you would not see me ruined, beggared, degraded, the scoff and scorn of all—yea, it may be an inmate of Newgate, and then it may be of Dartmoor—you must become the wife of Joab Scrowle!'

The girl heard this in silence and appalled, for the visit of Scrowle and the effect of his presence upon her father had made it but too apparent to herself and her sisters that some mystery was involved in the matter.

'Bear with me, child—bear with me, and pardon me,' he continued, piteously wringing his old and wrinkled hands. 'I may not live long, Dolly—I may die suddenly if this mental agony continue—this more than fear of exposure.'

'Exposure of what, papa?'

'I cannot tell you—suffice it that it is as I have told you.'

'What mysterious power this obnoxious creature with the odious name has over you, papa, I cannot imagine,' said the girl, who was pale as death; yet getting a kind of courage from despair, and deeming it something altogether incredible that she should be roughly separated from Vincent, 'but remember that I am—though your youngest daughter—no longer a child.'

'He has the power, perhaps, to deprive me of every shilling I have—to stamp our common name with ignominy—to thrust us into the streets, and to hand me over, as I have said, to felon's doom; and he will do so too, for he is pitiless as a

hungry tiger, unless I close his mouth for ever by making you his wife.'

'Papa !'

'It is so !'

'How—how ?'

'I cannot tell you, child, to make you loathe me more than perhaps you do already.'

'Do not speak thus, papa—oh, it is insanity !' said Dolly, weeping bitterly.

'Insanity, my darling—it seems so, indeed.'

* * * * *

'Let me see Vincent once again, papa, ere we part,' said Dolly, as a terrible effort at calmness took possession of her, when she began under her father's reiterations to take in the full and dire necessity of the martyrdom that awaited her ; but the meeting again with her lover proved too much for her, and he was transported with grief and fury.

'You are young, and the world is before you, Mr. Sheldon,' said Sir Jahleel, who felt overwhelmed with shame, 'and you may, nay will, with ease find another wife than Dolly. Good-bye, good-bye—the carriage is at the door.'

'This is infamous—it is an atrocious crime !' exclaimed Vincent, his dark eyes sparkling fire through their tears, as Dolly in a fit of low and hysterical sobbing fell on his breast, while he folded her in his arms, and kissed her cold wet cheeks again and again passionately, till at last, with a malediction on his lips, and the resolution that he would take some sharp, sure, and ulterior measure, he resigned her to her father and rushed away.

Never, so long as she lived, would poor Dolly forget the horror of that August evening.

Scrowle knew nothing of the aphorism which heads the present chapter, that 'he who gives quickly gives twice' ; he only knew, in his own parlance, that to Vincent Sheldon had been given 'the sack,' and quickly too ; he called him 'a ruffian, a snob, and a bully,' and great was his exultation now.

'What a lark—what a lark!' he thought, with glee, as he imbibed a foaming beaker of brandy and soda; 'that I should be the son-in-law of old Jahleel, who has such lots of blunt when I have none! It will all come right and pleasant when Dolly mops her eyes and gets over her historical fits. Here's a game!'

For the remainder of that terrible afternoon Dolly remained in the seclusion of her own room, totally unable to realise the situation in which she now found herself, weeping, weeping ceaselessly, and sobbing heavily in gasps, as if her heart would break.

In this prostrate condition she was found by her sisters when they returned from their ride. The departure, dismissal of their favourite, Vincent Sheldon, and the new position so suddenly assumed by Scrowle—a position endorsed by their father—added to their consternation, and Sir Jahleel cowered and shrank under the torture of their questioning eyes.

What did it mean—what could it mean? What was this secret of which Joab Scrowle was the master? Was it some great mistake in business? for a crime they thought it could not be. Yet poor Dolly was to be a martyr—to be sacrificed on the altar of expediency to this wretch—this mocking fiend, who held the honour of the whole family in his power.

In her beautiful boudoir, upholstered in satin wood and light blue velvet, the afternoon tea, in a delicate service of Sèvres, remained untasted on the gipsy table, and the sisters sat staring at each other, pale and silent. But what were the emotions—the horror—the blank horror of Kate—she who had thought the handsome but penniless Douglas so incredibly audacious, and whose anger at him had not always been a silent one, when she contemplated this new relation?

The gentle Violet's grief for herself and Douglas's supposed perfidy was now absorbed in her sympathy for Dolly, with profound amazement and mortification at the degrading peculiarity of her father's conduct.

'Marry—marry that horrible man—even to save you?—death

were better, papa,’ urged Kate sternly and indignantly. ‘Our bright and beautiful Dolly to become Mrs. Joab Scrowle ! What ghastly absurdity is this ?’

‘Circumstances alter cases,’ stammered Sir Jahleel.

‘But what has altered hers, or those of Vincent ?’

‘What is possible for me at one time may not be possible at another. Thus I have been compelled to forbid Mr. Vincent Sheldon my house,’ replied Sir Jahleel doggedly, as he withdrew trembling, not with anger, but intense shame.

‘My God !’ exclaimed Kate, as she raised her eyes and hands ; ‘what a strange atmosphere of mystery and mistrust is this into which we have been so suddenly plunged ?’

‘I am only eighteen,’ said Dolly ; ‘I may live forty years to come—forty years without Vincent ; and with that—that man !’ (She shuddered, and her teeth chattered as if with cold.) ‘Oh, what a living death ! What can papa have done that my whole life—my soul itself—may be sacrificed ?’

Long, long did Dolly weep and refuse to be comforted—weep till her eyesight became sore and dim ; and Violet, watching her as she lay on Kate’s bosom, clad in a cashmere *robe de chambre*, trimmed with softest swansdown, that seemed to nestle round her slender white neck, thought she had never seen their beloved Dolly look more beautiful.

Of course, a knowledge of the new phase of affairs—chiefly through the half-tipsy boasts of Scrowle himself—spread rapidly, and with many wild surmises and assertions among the watchful and observant denizens of the servants’ hall, adding pity now and no small contempt to their hitherto growing wonder ; but none was louder in reprehension than Ricochette.

‘*Mon Dieu !*’ she exclaimed, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes ; ‘*pauvre Monsieur Vincent—pauvre Mademoiselle Adolphine ! Mon étonnement est à son comble !*’

Mrs. Jellybagg and Mr. Tapleigh sighed over what they deemed the approaching ruin of the family ; and so closed this night of dismay over all in Barons Hall—at least, all save the

evil genius of the entire household, who was jubilant, grinning, gibing and exultant as a lubber-friend—Joab Scrowle !

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOLLY IN HER SORROW.

NEXT day the post brought betimes a fierce and bitter letter from old Mr. Sheldon, expressive of rage and disgust at Sir Jahleel's unaccountable change of mind, and resolution to coerce his youngest daughter, his treatment of Vincent, adding also some unpleasant suspicions of the reason for Scrowle's most singular influence in the Jermyn family.

Every word stung Sir Jahleel to the soul ; he knew how his conduct would be viewed by the world, and he sighed bitterly, both over Dolly's blighted happiness, his own helplessness and shame, and perhaps not a little over the loss of the solid fortune she would have shared as the wife of Vincent.

Mr. Sheldon loved the latter, his adopted son, very dearly, and he always doated on Dolly, and petted her for her own lovable qualities, and also as the *fiancée* of Vincent. Caprice on the knight's part this could not be ! What was it, then, that caused this sudden change in the family arrangements ? Could it be that Joab Scrowle was enormously rich — secretly a millionaire ? Considering the well-known character of Sir Jahleel, no other solution for his conduct could be found, and none could possibly imagine that the loss would be wholly on his side, and that Scrowle muttered thus in his ear :

'And Dolly—my Dolly—like her sisters, is to have at least a hundred thousand pounds. A hundred thousand pounds ! Oh, my eye !—is there so much money in the world ? How shall I ever know how to spend it ? When will you make the necessary arrangements ?'

'For what ?'

'What !' roared Scrowle ; 'why, the marriage.'

'As soon as I return to town,' Sir Jahleel replied, in a low, weak voice.

'Go at once.'

'I am too unwell just now ; but why this impatience ?'

'Because, Sir Jahleel, I wish to spend the honeymoon in—*Rotterdam*.'

Sir Jahleel placed his hand on Scrowle's shoulder, and looking him straight and full in the face, said huskily :

'Scrowle, swear to me, as you have any hope of forgiveness in the future, that Douglas is not the lost heir ?'

'I'll swear nothing at all till I see how you mean to act by me ; don't be in a hurry—keep quiet yet a while,' replied Scrowle sulkily, but confidently.

Times there were when Sir Jahleel's curious dread of Douglas was absorbed by that he had of Scrowle ; and amid his present trouble, he—like Kate—forgot all about Torthorwald, for ambition just then was dead in his heart ; but Dolly once married to Joab Scrowle, and *his* mouth, as it was to be hoped, thus closed, no doubt the claim would come on the *tapis* with renewed force and vigour.

Occasionally Sir Jahleel thought of consulting his solicitors, and making a clean breast of the crime of twenty years ago, and through them seeking to buy over effectually, or to 'gag' effectually in some fashion, this man Scrowle ; but so great was his craven fear of the latter, and so great was the power the latter wielded over him, that he let day by day go by, and matters drift hopelessly on, to the misery of himself and to the awful misery and ruin of Dolly.

By Scrowle's presence and bearing the whole family circle was utterly disorganized, and, finding that the house was shunned by many, Kate suggested a visit to the Continent ; but Dolly seemed far from well, and while he was amply supplied with wine and pocket-money, and felt himself quite master of the situation, Scrowle was by no means an impatient suitor, though occasionally a very waspish one.

Sir Jahleel was not a man much given to make new acquaintances ; he rather suspected *new* men ; if he could help it, he never visited or cultivated people solely because they lived in houses as big as his own, until he was quite assured of their perfect solvency.

At Barons Hall the most steady visitor was the Rev. Octave P. Bede, who, though he felt that there was something astounding on the *tapis*—‘something rotten in the state of Denmark’—never referred by the slightest hint thereto, though most anxious to be of service and act the part of a consoler ; but there were no more lawn-tennis, or croquet parties on the lawn, no more musical evenings ; thus he could only look unutterable things at the haughty Kate, while affecting to consult her as usual as to the state of his garden, the shortcomings of his housekeeper, and the spiritual state of the parish.

Dolly's once bright face was now full of rigid lines, thin and careworn like her father's.

‘Joab loves you quite as much as Vincent did,’ he once had the hardihood to say.

‘Vincent loves me still—why should he not ?’ she exclaimed sharply and wearily.

‘How many thousands of men and women marry without this thing you call love, or if any, all on one side ; and yet they get through life easily enough !’

Dolly felt that to speak was useless ; she could only sigh as if her heart was bursting.

‘Oh Dolly, my sweet, my innocent and child-like sister !’ was the constant wail of Violet ; ‘surely—surely kind Heaven will prevent this awful sacrifice—and a sacrifice for what ? oh, Lord, for *what* ?’

Douglas, she felt, seemed to have somehow vanished out of her life, but not out of her memory ; his image, his voice, his expression of face, were all with her still vividly and keenly, together with the constant wonder—why was he false ? why did he treat her so ?

But the sudden cessation of his attendance on herself—secret though it was—the darkening of her day-dream of love and romance—the end of their delicious companionship, made a terrible void in the girl's life.

'Many have sorrows to face and go through like mine--disappointments as bitter; but I cannot, as many do, go through them silently and enduringly,' she said to herself often, while restraining her tears.

Some of her emotions and reflections were the same as Dolly's; the latter had not the supposed falsehood of a lover to deplore, but she had the grotesque horror of such a suitor as Scrowle to endure.

To be with her handsome and winning Vincent—to meet him—to part with him, but with the knowledge that they would meet soon again, and that every day was bringing nearer the one on which they would never more be separated, had made up the round of Dolly's life, apart from that she led in society, and even in that circle her Vincent bore, to her, the most prominent part.

Now all this was changed! He seemed to have been suddenly blotted out of her existence; to have become a thing of the past, or something that had never been at all; and a creature odious beyond description, like the vision of a nightmare, had taken his place; and yet, amid her tears, she would keep repeating his name, fondly and fatuously:

'Vincent—Vincent—my own dearest Vincent!'

By her father's earnest entreaties, rather than by his command, she was compelled to see Scrowle, and—if she could—affect to tolerate him; but the air of proprietary he assumed after a time incensed her, while his attempted love-making, his oglings, writhings, and contortions of visage, excited her loathing and her terror.

Dolly's features were not regular, but were usually—or had been—full of the beauty of life, colour, and movement; she was simply fascinating and full of charming ways, but these,

and her fascination too, were somewhat lost upon the present suitor ; to him she was chiefly the means to an end.

At times she was forced to listen to him and to answer.

‘Do consider the disparities between us, Mr. Scrowle,’ said she on one occasion piteously.

‘I don’t know what disparities are,’ he replied. ‘Do you mean age?’

‘Oh no,’ she said, afraid as yet to offend him.

‘In what?—it can’t be rank,’ he responded impatiently.

‘No.’

‘In what the deuce, then?’

‘In taste, pursuits, even intellect perhaps—I am but a half-grown girl.’

‘Half-grown—you are a very plump one for all that,’ he replied with an odious leer, while kneading and rolling up his handkerchief between the palms of his hands—a way he had—mopping them, as it were, for his hideous digits were always moist, damp, and fish-like. He tried to capture the dazzling white hand of Dolly ; but she drew haughtily back, and he failed.

‘Now, don’t be cross,’ said he, in a tone of warning ; ‘you know that your papa—dear, good old gentleman!—means that you shall be good-natured, nice, and devoted to me—to your own Joab!’ added this species of ‘Quilp,’ dancing round her in his spiteful love-making.

She gave a glance in which grief was curiously mingled with profound scorn and anger—emotions unseen in her sweet face before the advent of Scrowle.

‘I ain’t such a toad as you think, young woman,’ said he, a little sullenly ; ‘and in time you’ll come to like me, to love me, and all that sort of thing, just as other men’s wives do.’

‘Have you no pity, sir?’

‘Say Joab now,’ said he, with a leer.

‘Joab Scrowle, I repeat, have you no pity?’

‘What the dickens do you want pity for? Ain’t you rich enough—ain’t you well enough off ; and a handsome young creature to boot?’

'When will you learn that though I may endure your rudeness, your flattery, or attempted flattery, excites my anger?'

'And my love-making?'

'Loathing—there,' said the girl wearily, 'you understand me, do you not, sir?'

'Well, you speak plain enough to a fellow, in all conscience,' said he, with a dark look. Then he uttered a sneering laugh, and began to roll up his handkerchief more vigorously than ever, till it seemed to become quite a damp ball.

Looking him fully and steadily in the face, and for the time forgetting the fears and entreaties of her father, she said:

'Can you understand, sir, that your advances to me, and all these peculiar utterances of yours, are alike distasteful and monstrous?'

'Is this a farce we are acting?'

'To me it is a tragedy.'

'And a bitter and terrible tragedy I may make it to you, to your sisters, and to your infernal old governor, if you don't change your tune!' said he, as his waspish nature gave place to sudden rage, and an expression of fierce triumph flashed in his bleary grey eyes.

A threat of this kind openly made thus, and having direct reference to the mysterious power which he held over her father, was always sufficient to fill her with vague terror for him, and hence to plunge herself into helplessness.

'Oh sir!' she exclaimed, clasping her poor little tremulous hands together, while an expression of intense entreaty filled her soft eyes, 'have pity, have pity on me, I implore you,' she continued, making an effort to conceal the repugnance he inspired as she saw that it filled him with curiously blended rage and amusement; 'surely, sir, you have never known what misery is!'

'Haven't I, just! I have known what it is to be without a blessed bob in this world, or where to look for a chop and a pint of stout.'

'Have pity on me!' she wailed again.

'Which in plain English means to hand you over to that riotous snob, young Sheldon,' he replied, his genuine wrath rising as he remembered his double knock-down in the lawn.

'Will not money move you?'

'Money might; but it will be best secured to me through you, by you, and with you; and I am not going to give up any of my just rights.'

'Your rights?'

'Promised me by your father.'

'As the price of your secrecy?'

'Yes—precisely so—as the price of my secrecy.'

'For what?'

He struck the side of his red nose with the forefinger of his right hand, and replied, with an ugly leer of intense cunning:

'Don't think, young woman, that I am going to peach, or blab, or let the cat out of the bag, even to you, or any person but one.'

'And that one?'

'Must be a magistrate—there!'

'Oh, merciful God—I have no hope!' moaned Dolly, covering her face with her interlaced fingers, between which the hot tears were streaming; 'what can this crime have been?'

'Ah—what indeed?' said he, with a diabolical grin.

The fate her father had thrust upon her proved his complicity in some dark act, the clue to which lay in the hands of Scrowle, and the shame of this conviction added to her terror and sorrow. To her the tormentor seemed more than ever a mocking and insulting fiend, and now, when he very deliberately attempted to put an arm caressingly around her, and draw her towards him, she started up, thrust back his face furiously with her open hands, and with such force that he nearly measured his length on the carpet. Then she rushed from the room and from the house to the lawn, and, on reaching a secluded place, wept bitterly.

'Oh, degradation! oh, dishonour!—oh, misery!' she continued to reiterate, while swaying herself to and fro, in the excess of her grief and utter shame.

Scrowle uttered a fierce oath and muttered:

'I'll end this nonsense one way or other—and pretty quick too!'

He already began to fear that by delay, or use and wont, the hold he had on Sir Jahleel might loosen, or something very unexpected might come to pass—suppose even the death of the latter—to mar all his cunning plans and avaricious prospects. Moreover, Dolly's loathing of his person began to pique self-esteem even in him, and to rouse in his breast an emotion of revenge.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'MY POVERTY, BUT NOT MY WILL, CONSENTS.'

DOUGLAS was drudging at his desk one morning, writing on one subject and thinking on another alternately—that other being Violet and the mystery of the returned ring, returned so abruptly and silently, and ever and anon he laid down his pen, and placing his forehead on his hand, gave way to a fit of abstraction, and longing to find some clue to the cause of her conduct—when the door was abruptly opened, and Vincent Sheldon entered with a face expressive of extreme agitation and unsteady step.

'Man alive, what's up?' exclaimed Douglas, as they cordially shook hands; 'my dear fellow, you are ill?'

'Giddy—the heat—that is all,' said Vincent, as he threw himself into a chair.

I do not think I have yet described Vincent Sheldon, who was in many respects—though perhaps less dignified in bearing—very much the counterpart of Douglas.

His appearance was refined; he was tall and slender, with

hands that were handsome, without being effeminate. He had a well-shaped head, the dark hair of which was shorn close in a military manner, for Vincent was a captain of Rifle Volunteers, and affected the *militaire*. A dark moustache shaded the sensitive and somewhat pensive-like mouth—at least, it looked more than usually pensive now.

He had a straight nose, a forehead rather broad than high, a complexion somewhat pale, and eyes of a variable greyish blue, that Dolly thought were the sweetest eyes in the world.

‘We have not seen each other for some time,’ he said, after a little pause.

‘No,’ replied Douglas, colouring. ‘I have been left to bake up here in dusty London.’

‘Why? Any hitch?’

‘Hitch—no; but what is the matter with *you*?’

‘I like you, Douglas; I always liked you, and now I have come to confide in you,’ replied Sheldon, as he tossed aside his hat and gnawed the ivory handle of his cane.

‘All are well at Barons Hall, I hope?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ exclaimed Vincent Sheldon, as his eyes flashed; ‘and yet, it is about those who are there I came to speak. But, perhaps, as Sir Jahleel’s private secretary, you already know all.’

‘All—about what?’ asked Douglas, thinking instantly of Violet, and surprised by the other’s manner.

‘About Dolly and me,’ replied Sheldon, in an unsteady voice as he uttered the name so dear to him.

‘No.’

‘All is up between us.’

In a few words, he excited to the full the horror and bewilderment of Douglas, and his deepest sympathy too, by relating recent events at Barons Hall, and Scrowle’s permanent residence there.

‘Scrowle! Dolly to be the wife of Scrowle—*bongré, malgré*, whether she will or not!’ exclaimed Douglas, his dark eyes

dilating and the knit in his forehead deepening, as he watched the quivering lip of Sheldon—'this is so monstrous as to be an absurdity—so cruel as to be diabolical.'

'Be it monstrous, absurd, and diabolical, it is nevertheless true—absolutely true.'

'This act is the result of something else, hidden and unknown to you,' said Douglas, after a pause; 'and it seems very, very wicked, Sheldon.'

'It is worse than wickedness,' exclaimed the lover furiously, 'it is insanity!'

'It is *not* insanity,' said Douglas, 'or if so, there is a strange method in it.'

'What do you mean?'

'That this man, Joab Scrowle, has, I know, a strange power over Sir Jahleel.'

'Power?'

'Yes; there is some dark secret between them, known to themselves alone.'

'You think so?' exclaimed Sheldon, looking up with interest and wonder in his face.

'I am sure of it. I mention my suspicion to you in confidence.'

'Of course, my dear fellow, of course.'

'And with some sorrow, too,' added Douglas, as he thought of Violet.

'You must be intimate with most of Sir Jahleel's private affairs—his claim to a peerage, and so forth,' observed Vincent after a pause.

'Certainly I am.'

'Then you know what this event is?' exclaimed Vincent Sheldon, springing up.

'On the contrary, I cannot make the slightest guess at it. I only know that at any reference to a certain town Sir Jahleel grows pale, and even trembles.'

'And this town?'

'Is Rotterdam.'

'Rotterdam!' said Vincent, changing colour visibly, and seeming to ponder for a little space.

'And Dolly is the price of Scrowle's silence! Oh, what infamous selfishness!'

'It has been correctly said, that what is termed so, often consists in our not doing what the selfishness of another wishes you to do,' said Vincent bitterly, as he bit his nether lip till the blood nearly came. 'But I wonder why Jupiter made man—as the ancients say he did—half in sport and half in cruelty?'

'This crime—for such it is—must not be permitted to take place. Poor Dolly—so sweet, so innocent and happy!'

'But how to avert it?' asked Vincent furiously.

'Carry her off—end the matter—cut the Gordian knot!'

'Or Scrowle's throat! Carry her off? Well thought of; and, by heaven, I will, Douglas!' exclaimed Vincent, as he grasped the latter's hand.

'Write her on the subject ere it is too late.'

'How too late?'

'Because you know nothing of the high pressure that may be brought to bear upon the poor girl. It is not for nothing that a hard-headed and hard-hearted City man like Sir Jahleel winces, cowers, and trembles under the eye of this reptile—Joab Scrowle!'

'My letter might be intercepted—might fail to reach her; then how should I act?'

'You know the maze—the labyrinth—in the grounds?' asked Douglas sadly, as he recalled the place to memory.

'Perfectly,' replied Vincent, for he too had many a tender reminiscence of the spot.

'Ask her to meet you there on a given evening, with an alternative of the *next*, lest something unforeseen might preclude her keeping the appointment.'

'But how to reach her hand?' said Vincent, who was full of despondency.

'Is Ricochette to be trusted ?'

'Surely ! Many a sovereign I have given the girl ; and she is, I know, sincerely attached to Dolly.'

'Moreover, as a French maid, she will be quite in her element, when assisting in an *affaire de cœur*. So write to Dolly under cover to Ricochette, and she can forward the reply.'

'Thanks—a thousand times—for the suggestion ! Give me a pen !' exclaimed Vincent, drawing his chair to the writing-table ; but ere writing he said, 'I had better indite my letter elsewhere.'

'Why ?'

'If Sir Jahleel came to know of your advice or suggestions, you might lose your situation.'

'How can he ever know ? Besides, I care nothing for him or the situation,' replied Douglas, as the remarkable knit deepened in his haughty forehead ; and yet he laughed, and Vincent remembered his curious manner and scornful laugh long after he had a key to both. There was often a careless pride in the bearing of Douglas, and in his dark eyes an expression that suggested they were wont to look upon inferiors ; but much of this had departed since Violet had disappointed him, and his mood became sad, low, and dispirited.

'I am Sir Jahleel's private and confidential secretary, true,' said he ; 'but, in being so, Sheldon, my poverty, but not my will, consents.'

'Honeywood always said you were an enigma.'

'Honeywood,' said Douglas, starting ; 'did he ever say anything *more* about me ?'

'Not that I remember ; but why ?'

'Why matters not—yet.'

'More mystery !'

'I work for the salary Sir Jahleel pays me ; thus to him and to his family I am in no way indebted.'

'Of course not,' said Vincent, looking at him earnestly ; 'but what do you mean ?'

‘Simply what I say.’

‘I refer, Douglas, to your bitterness of tone. You loved Violet Jermyrn.’

The dark face of Douglas flushed scarlet as he said :

‘I did, and I do love her still.’

‘I was certain of it, but I always thought you—pardon me—rash.’

‘It was rash so far as money, and, we may say, *position*, went ; but who could help loving Violet ?’

‘Did she know of it, Douglas ?’ asked Sheldon in a tone of kindly interest.

‘Yes.’

‘You told her so ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good heavens ! and she——’

‘She accepted me ; we were engaged.’

‘And you are now——’

‘Less to each other than strangers who have never met !’ said Douglas bitterly.

‘How came this about—all so suddenly, too ?’

‘In one fashion, I mean, I am nothing to her, though she is yet all the world to me.’

‘Explain this, if you can do so.’

‘Simply, she returned to me her engagement ring without a word, without a line, coldly and contemptuously ; and till now I have endured the sting in silence, and I tell you, Sheldon, that it has proved a sharp sting to me. But if she thinks to make my heart—the heart that comes of a race ever tender and true—a plaything to trample under foot, she is very much mistaken.’

‘It is you who mistake Violet, I hope. There must have been some treachery—some strange misconception.’

‘Would that I could think so, Sheldon !’

‘Has Sir Jahleel any suspicion of all this ?’

‘I should think not. He would discard me at once.’

'Should that ever happen, permit me to befriend you, Douglas—that is, of course, if you care about it ; but you have your own home and people——'

'I have no home, and I have no people,' said Douglas gloomily.

'Poor Douglas,' said Sheldon, 'I am sorry to hear you say so.'

'In this world I stand alone—lord of myself—"that heritage of woe," to quote Lane,' he added, with one of his curious smiles ; 'but have a cigar.'

'Thanks ; I do not understand you, Douglas.'

'Very probably,' said the latter, scraping a match. 'I scarcely understand myself.'

'But surely, unless I am greatly mistaken, you do not seem to have been born for desk drudgery—to this hand-to-mouth business.'

'Never mind what I was born for ; life is ever easy to those who take it so, and are grateful for any ray of the sun heaven may send them. I am the last of my race, Sheldon.'

'What—are there no more Douglasses, "tender and true," in Scotland?'

'There are Douglasses galore — plentiful as blackberries, thank God ; but none of my line save myself exist now ; and it is as well.'

'Why?'

'Because I have been made to feel what poverty—particularly genteel poverty—is.'

'It is the school for heroes, according to Miss Braddon.'

'And too often for housebreakers.'

'How bitter you are!'

'With others—not myself. Just now you spoke of Sir Harry Honeywood. He admires Violet.'

'More than that—he loves her too. I am certain of it.'

'But she rejected him.'

'True ; but I fear he may make his innings now, for he is much about Barons Hall again, and Kate, I know, will back

him to any extent,' replied Vincent, so full of his own love affairs as to be unconscious how much this offhand information must sting Douglas. 'And now to write to Dolly—my poor victimised Dolly—under cover to Ricochette.'

He drew towards him a sheet of note-paper, crested with the pugs' head of the Jermyns, and while Douglas smoked on in silence and full of angry thoughts, he wrote to Dolly; but the process seemed a slow and laborious one. Vincent was not an adept at composition, and in addition to his reiterated protestation of love and so forth, he had to expatiate upon the misery that awaited them both if she became the prey of Scrowle and the victim of her father's craven fears. He had also to urge upon her to ignore whatever menaced the latter, and seek safety in flight with himself; lastly, to be at a certain time in their old favourite haunt, the labyrinth, when he would tell her more and arrange finally.

'How long you are about composing that note,' said Douglas; 'one might think you were only learning to write.'

'It would seem so—there' replied Vincent, as he enclosed it to Mademoiselle Ricochette, with a complimentary remark or two to that young lady, which he knew would not fail to please and ensure her fidelity. 'What a relief this is to my mind! How I thank you, Douglas, for your countenance and advice, and how glad I am that I came here to seek them.'

But after Vincent had taken his departure Douglas did no more work that day.

His visitor had left him with ample food for deep and anxious thought. He felt keenly for Dolly, whom he sincerely loved and admired; and he thought of the gentle Violet, whom he had loved and admired still more. What must be *her* emotions at the prospect of such a catastrophe—such a grotesque *fiasco*, occurring in her family? What was the crime (if such existed) of which Sir Jahleel had been guilty? Where and when had it been committed? and whence came the mysterious power of Joab Scrowle, who could pull the wires

thus, forcing himself upon the family of the Jermyns in this astounding manner—promising silence on one hand, discovery and disgrace upon the other?

Even these degrading suspicions did not lessen the love of Douglas, though they greatly increased his pity for Violet.

But, alas! the return of the ring seemed to be accounted for now! After being rejected, Sir Harry Honeywood was again visiting at Barons Hall. With what view or purpose could his visits be resumed but *one*? and as 'the ice had been already broken' on the subject of matrimony between them, dearer and more tender relations might soon be developed now.

Douglas recalled the words of a writer, who says that 'if a man cannot win the woman he loves, it were surely that he should teach himself to love one who seems more easily attainable.'

'But I won her!' said he to himself impetuously, 'and henceforth there is no other woman in the world for me.'

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRYSTING-PLACE.

THOUGH Sir Harry Honeywood came pretty frequently, attracted by the still indifferent Violet, who never gave him the opportunity of being alone with her for a moment, though she often played billiards with him, and practised ever so many out-of-the-way strokes, the presence of Scrowle scared away most of the usual visitors; and now there were no more excursions to Lewes or Newhaven, no more gallops on the breezy downs, no pic-nics to Fairlight Glen, no drives, boating, kettledrums, or lawn-tennis for the three girls at Barons Hall—though times had been when no less than eight courts of the latter had been seen on the lawn, while the band of the Royal Sussex Light Infantry made music there—and the box from Mudie's was never opened now.

One day when they were at luncheon, Scrowle, by his

effusiveness, made himself more than usually obnoxious to Dolly, who was compelled to sit beside him. Afternoon tea was Mr. Scrowle's pet aversion; he could not understand it at all! But at luncheon, dinner time, or any other time, he was always equal to the occasion, and could consume an amount of Cliquot or Roederer, Marcobrunner or Clos Vougeot that appalled Mr. Tapleigh, though, like the farmers in *Punch's* cartoon, he 'never got any forrader' on them.

Mr. Scrowle was lunching—gluttonising rather, till his blood-shot eyes stood in his head—on such things as he had never seen before—Perigord pie, lobster mayonnaise, and soles à la maître d'hotel, with champagne, to which he infinitely preferred stronger liquor—and talking away to Dolly, in his own fashion, the while, with his mouth crammed.

'I suppose I must give you my photograph now, my dear; I don't require yours—your image is engraved on my very 'art. Papa says as you are a good daughter, and a good daughter always makes a good wife.'

She made no answer, but glanced mutely across the table to Violet.

'Ah,' resumed Scrowle, draining a tumbler of champagne, 'it is quite evident you don't like having your young man always dancing attendance on you, as I do—eh?'

She twisted her slender fingers in and out of her watch chain with an air of intense weariness, mingled with abstraction and exasperation, so Scrowle began to wax waspish.

'You'll find, my dear, that in gaining me for your husband you gain more than you've lost,' said he, bending his head towards her.

'Dolly's loss is not small, Mr. Scrowle,' said Sir Jahleel, in a low tone, and with some severity of manner, as he took a rather mercantile view of the transaction; 'old Mr. Sheldon will leave half a million of money.'

'Well, if he could take it with him to old Boots, perhaps his heir wouldn't get it.'

‘Half a million of money, sir—made honestly, without a speck or blot upon a shilling of it!’

‘Ah, they would reckon it by guilders in Rotterdam,’ said Scrowle mischievously: then, turning again to Dolly, he whispered, ‘you must let me spoon on you a little, my popsy-wopsy, for after we are married you may find life ain’t all beer and skittles, or all moonlight and kisses, as we see it on the stage; and then,’ he added, leering horribly, ‘when the little Joabs and Dollies come—but what is the matter?’

A little cry of acute mental pain escaped her, and there was a faint convulsive movement of her delicate white throat, and unable to endure more, she rose and left the room, followed by the mute glances of her pale sisters—Kate’s delicately pencilled eyebrows were knit with bitter anger—while Scrowle uttered a snorting laugh, and with perfect equanimity and undiminished appetite, attacked the Perigord pie.

Dolly took her sunshade and hurried forth into the grounds, anxious only to be alone—alone to think, lest she should go mad. Only eighteen, and already the flavour of life had gone out of her!

In her blind desperation she sometimes thought of running away; but then a mortal terror of what Scrowle might do in revenge upon her father, by revealing the secret that gave him such power over them all, repressed the passionate longing, and she felt stricken, feeble, helpless!

Had she been the coldest and most passionless girl in England, she might well have shuddered and shrunk from the advances of Joab Scrowle; but loving Vincent as she did, words would fail to express her emotions.

She stood in the familiar green velvet-like lawn, yet she stared about her with a bewildered aspect. Amid a sea of variously coloured clouds, the sun was verging westward; and the edges of the distant downs, the spires of Brighton, and the houses that cluster on the lofty cliffs of Kemp Town, were tipped with gold.

The bright sunshine, the summer landscape, flushed with

brilliant colours, the perfumes of the roses, the heliotrope, and the mignonette, the hum of the bees, the yellow and white butterflies flashing to and fro, had no joy for her now.

She had a great delight in nature. The fields, the flowers, the woods, the stream, had been to her sources of boundless pleasure, and she loved birds and dogs and horses. She was wont never to tire of sketching ; but wayward, impulsive, and erratic, she never finished anything, were it copying music, starting a piece of crotchet or crewel work, or a sketch from nature. Thus her portfolio was full of half-done drawings of all kinds.

How often in the very spot where she now lingered had she planted her camp-stool, adjusted her little easel and drawing-block to sketch or paint, while Vincent lay at her feet on the grass smoking and gazing up at her lovingly and laughingly.

Now the sun shone, the golden or fleecy clouds floated past ; the bees hummed, and the birds sang in vain ; for Dolly saw nothing, and heard nothing ; the pleasure in these things had departed with her piquancy, chic, and *espieglerie*, and all her efforts at being, as she used to phrase it, 'tremendously busy about anything.

Dolly thought was she, who was now haunted by the ogre Joab Scrowle, the same girl who wandered there with Vincent Sheldon ? Dolly the joyous, who had never been more so than when, hand in hand with her handsome lover, she had strolled in the sweet summer sunshine across that lovely lawn in the orchard, where fragrant blossoms grew ; in the bosky dell, whence they had glimpses of the sea, rippling away to the green grassy height of Beachy Head—an engaged girl, soon to be a wife, yet happy in all a child's pleasure, berrying in the old quarry, where the brambles grew, swinging under the old sycamore, welcoming the first swallow of the year, and whether with him or not, thinking ever and always of Vincent Sheldon ?

Now she felt like one in a newly-invented world

His engagement ring was still upon her finger, and, whatever happened, would never leave it while life remained. Luckily, Joab Scrowle knew nothing of such symbols, and had not offered her the cruel mockery of another.

Inexpressible sadness crept into her sweetly soft face, as she leant against the trunk of a tree, and looking straight before her, as at some distant object, she said aloud—

‘If Douglas would help me, I am sure I could do it—teach in some school, clean lace, nurse sick old folks, or something. I am sure I might trust Douglas; he is such a dear fellow; though, perhaps, he fears papa and the loss of his situation. So why not Vincent? Oh, no—no! I dare not do that!’

At that moment Ricochette, her expressive French face full of brightness, ardour, and importance, came timidly towards her, looking about the while to see that they were unobserved.

‘Oh, mademoiselle!’ she exclaimed, ‘I have a letter for you—a letter from Monsieur Vincent!’

And drawing it from the breast of her dress, she placed in the hand of her startled young mistress the letter already referred to, which had just come under cover to herself, and in which he implored Dolly to meet him next evening at their old favourite haunt, the labyrinth.

Again and again she read it, hot tears blinding her vision the while; then impulsively she threw her arms round Ricochette and kissed her; and the not less impulsive French maid, full of ardour in being the *confidante* of a pair of lovers, kissed her fondly in return.

‘Oh, mademoiselle!’ she exclaimed, ‘choose a husband for yourself, and don’t be like one of our miserable fools of French girls, who are educated in convents, and then married they don’t know to whom.’

In the seclusion of her own room, Dolly poured out on paper, filling up sheet after sheet to be ‘devoured’ by Vincent, her woes and misery, promising faithfully to be at the time and place appointed, with a postscript, of course, ending thus:

'I send you a kiss, my own darling, where I have put this round "O" on the paper.'

To-morrow evening, if all went right, she would again see Vincent, were it even for the last time! She would meet him at all hazards and risks, avoiding the dinner-table, remaining in her own room, pleading illness, that she might be perfectly free, and aware that her sisters, so far from betraying her, would assist in the deception, provided it went no further, for they too had now a supreme terror of Scrowle.

Oh, joy! she thought, for joy it was, amid her horror and heavy grief; she would see Vincent again, after the many woful weeks, lay her head upon his breast, and hope she might die there!

The hour, the moment, the time of their meeting, came—a brief meeting of curiously mingled sorrow and joy—and again they were together, hand clasped in hand, eye to eye, and heart to heart.

'Dolly!'

'Vincent!'

Vincent took her little face, so wan and wasted now, between his hands, and regarded it passionately and lovingly, with sore grief in his heart and a silent curse on his lips; regarded the soft eyes now dim with much and continued weeping; the long dark lashes and eyebrows, and the brilliant golden hair of his own victimised Dolly, and to him it seemed that the beauty of the golden hair alone remained unchanged.

'Oh, Vincent!' she exclaimed, 'how am I to live through the years of my life without you, and how are you to live those years without me?'

'It shall not be so; we shall live our lives together, Dolly,' replied Vincent, in a voice that was husky with emotion. 'My darling, is it any wonder that in a world so strange as this, a man at times loses heart, and marvels why heaven created him? But we must not lose heart, Dolly; and when next we meet again it must be to part no more—to part no more, my sweet one!' he added, caressing her tenderly and fondly.

'How, Vincent—how?' she asked chokingly, as a swelling came into her delicate throat.

'It is very simple : we were betrothed before heaven and before the world—at least, all who know us. Let us fly together, and unite our fate together, as your father meant it to be united, and our marriage once an accomplished fact, we can no more be separated ; and the long vista that wraps the future—the long vista of happy to-morrows—will come in due course, Dolly.'

'But papa——'

She paused, as a sound startled them like a foot on the ground or decayed twigs. Were they watched ? Scrowle was capable of any meanness. Vincent darted out of the labyrinth, on hostile views intent, but there was no one visible.

'So when we meet again, say to-morrow evening, Dolly,' Vincent resumed ; but interrupting him, she said :

'When Ricochette gave me your dear letter, Vincent, I could not resist the temptation to come here ; but we must meet no more, Vincent, and I—I—I must become the victim of this man Scrowle.'

'Why—why ?'

'To save papa.'

'From who, or what ?'

'How often am I to say to you, as to others, alas ! I know not from what ?'

'This is weakness on your part and wickedness on his,' said Vincent, as rage mingled with his alarm and love ; 'this bogey of your father's, this old man of the sea, must be fled from, if we cannot shunt him. He is a beast,' continued Vincent savagely, 'whether the power he has acquired be through Sir Jahleel's crimes or follies—a beast of the lowest type. Love you ?—he cannot love you ! It is mere avarice that turns the screw. And cannot your father or I buy his silence, for whatever their mutual crime may be—and I suppose it is a mutual one ?'

wildly, no harm might accrue to the old father who had so loved and so petted her till this time of evil came.

And Vincent—how sweet to think they had met again, and again would meet on the morrow !

Their love had been a glorious idyll to them—no petty quarrels to make up—no fits of heat and cold—no reconciliations, however tender, had been necessary between them, and a few hours now might make them inseparable for life.

She cast herself upon her knees by the side of her bed, and burying her face in her hands, prayed—prayed with all the fervour of her pure and sinless soul, that Heaven might inspire and strengthen her to do that which was right, and give her that peace which passeth all understanding.

Prayer so deep and fervent was a new experience to Dolly (though she never omitted her orisons at morning or night), and now she rose with calmness and courage to prepare for her flight!

CHAPTER XXVI.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

SLOWLY passed the hours of the day with Vincent Sheldon, who counted them and the minutes, and unconsciously smoked an incredible number of cigars to wile away the time, which, however, passed quickly, when he was unexpectedly joined by Douglas, who was in feverish anxiety to see Dolly, and to hear from her lips something of Violet, and hoping to obtain some clue, perhaps, to the return of the engagement-ring.

Alas ! he thought he had obtained that fully and bitterly, when hovering, by an irresistible impulse, near the stately gate of Barons Hall, he—by a strange fatality—saw again, as on a former occasion, Sir Harry Honeywood ride forth with a very self-satisfied air, attended by a mounted groom, and canter off in the direction of the barracks.

This was just about sunset.

Anger was his first emotion, but even with it he could not

help endeavouring to give Violet the benefit of a doubt, as of all the girls he had ever met she had seemed the noblest and the best, the one least likely to yield without a moral and mental effort : but he missed something sorely in his life now ; for where was the love with which *she* had given a new colour to every thought in his mind—a new impulse to every emotion of his heart?

He had known and learned to love Violet in a very short time, it seemed ; yet in that brief space lay the drama of a life ; and all that had gone before it—nor was that all without its many startling features—had been but a prologue or preface.

On the other hand, Violet, believing him to be unworthy of the love she had so generously bestowed upon him, was seeking to uproot his image from her heart—a difficult task, yet one in which she was assisted to the fullest extent ever and anon by Kate, who likened him to Romeo, the lover of Rosalind at noon, and of Juliet at night. ‘You must forget that you ever knew the person Douglas—pluck this idle weed—this Scotch thistle out of your heart, and think of your nobler and better love, Sir Harry.’

Vincent welcomed Douglas, because he liked him sincerely ; but yet he felt that on this occasion he would rather have been alone with his new found happiness, or rather his returned joy—alone with the stars and the image of Dolly.

When the friends set forth it was a perfect evening for the season ; the sky was placid ; it had the tint of the rose, blended with those of the amethyst and amber, when the sun had set beyond the bronze-like foliage of the old oaks and the green swellings of the more distant downs.

The private key enabled them to enter unnoticed the park and lawns. A hundred years and more had been required to bring the latter and the woods and shrubberies at Barons Hall to what they were now. There the oak, the Spanish chestnut, the copper beech, the acacia and the mountain ash, the wild plum and the cypress, mingled in all their glory, and

not a withered branch was to be seen among them, so carefully were they lopped, trimmed, and tended by Sir Jahleel's Scottish gardener.

It was in the early days of September now, when the hazel copse is golden-hued and the nuts are being gathered in the woods, while the last of the yellow grain is gathered on the uplands.

The labyrinth at Barons Hall was surrounded by every variety of beautiful verdure—the acacias were shedding their subtle perfume on the cool air of the twilight evening. The stems of the silver birches glimmered, and the leaves of the aspen quivered, but there was no sign of a floating skirt or of the light figure of Dolly.

In the middle distance of the landscape rose the stately masses of Barons Hall; the many windows of the great irregular façade were shining in the light of the moon's broad round disc that shed a world of silvery splendour on everything—'too much,' as Vincent said, just then, for their secret purpose.

On the house, and every path that led thereto, he fixed his eyes anxiously, while his heart beat tumultuously.

The friends scarcely spoke, or if they did so, they spoke in whispers. There was no sound in the air, save the occasional barking of a dog, and the ceaseless splashing of an ornamental fountain close by their lurking place—a fountain in the basin of which Vincent had seen Dolly many a time toy with her pretty little hand, while the gold and silver fish shot to and fro.

Hour followed hour—still there was no sign of her.

Where was she now—in which room of all that spacious mansion was she then? How occupied, or how interfered with, that she came not?

Was the moon so bright that she feared to come forth; and would she come when it waned or darkness fell deeper?

Vincent could but wait, till anxiety grew to agony—wait, for he had no other resource, and keep watching the façade of Barons Hall, till it seemed to become photographed on his

brain ; and a grand old mansion it was—a house in which generations had been born, had lived, and died—a house that had many stirring histories, but none connected with the family of the *nouveau riche* Sir Jahleel Jermyn (of Selby and Jermyn) as yet, unless the loves of poor Dolly formed one.

Once or twice the great entrance door, or rather the half thereof, was opened, and a stream of warm light gushed therefrom upon the lawn and terrace. Each time this occurred the heart of Vincent bounded, and he clutched the arm of Douglas ; but the door was closed again, and no one came forth.

Now the distant clock in the stable-yard struck ten, and he had hoped long ere that time to have felt the thrilling touch of Dolly's hand in his own.

'What can have happened?' he exclaimed for the hundredth time, his soul trembling at the thought of failure under any pressure of circumstances or unforeseen contingency.

'The passionate kiss—the 'yes' that seemed to come from her inmost heart—forbade all chance that she had changed her mind.

'Something has occurred—she will come to-morrow,' said he, with husky voice. 'What *can* have happened? Can Ricochette have proved faithless and betrayed us?'

Was Dolly ill? Alas! it was all worse than even his affectionate heart could have anticipated.

Suddenly the entrance door was again flung open ; several horses were brought round from the stables, and mounted servants went galloping down the avenue towards Brighton.

Then lights were seen floating to and fro in various rooms, ascending from floor to floor, and voices were heard, and great confusion seemed to reign in Barons Hall. An alarm had evidently been given, so Douglas and Vincent Sheldon stole across the lawn, choosing the most shaded paths, and quitting the park by the private gate.

'She will come to-morrow or send me some sign, unless we have been cruelly deceived,' said Sheldon, as he softly closed the gate ; and he spent a sleepless night at his hotel, while Douglas, anxious and disappointed, returned to London.

Vincent remembered the sound that caught his ear in the labyrinth, and believed that she was the victim of some eaves-dropper, if not of Scrowle himself.

The morrow evening came, and the evening of the next day came also, and saw Vincent waiting in breathless anxiety at the trysting-place, but no Dolly ever came, for at the very time when he and Douglas were quitting the park she was lying on her bed motionless and still—still as death itself could make her, with her sisters hanging over her in speechless agony, while Joab Scrowle was grinning, grinding his teeth, muttering curses, and imbibing numerous stiff grogs in Mr. Tapleigh's pantry, much to the disgust of that most respectable butler.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE THREAT.

ON the afternoon of the day which was to have seen the flight from Barons Hall, the general aspect of Dolly excited the keenest commiseration of Violet.

'My poor pet,' said she, caressing the girl's golden head on her breast, 'how tired you look! Go to your room; lie down and sleep if you can, before the gong sounds for dinner, or shall I desire the housekeeper to send you up some tea?'

'No—thanks, dear,' replied Dolly wearily, yet responding tenderly to her sister's caress; 'I cannot sleep—but I am tired, so let me not be disturbed.'

And she went slowly to her room, walking mechanically, as one would who walked in sleep, her eyes fixed on vacancy, while the gaze of Violet followed her sadly. So the afternoon passed into evening. And this was the time when, but for the visit of Scrowle and the change he had wrought in their affairs, the three sisters were to have been with Sir Harry and other friends at a grand fancy dress ball in the Pavilion—a ball for which their costumes

had been selected long before—a ball at which all the ‘beauty and chivalry’ of Sussex and Brighton would be present, and to which Dolly had looked forward with such excitement and delight as only a girl of eighteen can feel, but in the minds of all the three the event had passed into oblivion, and it was as utterly unthought of as if it was never to have been.

On this evening Sir Jahleel was in London to urge his solicitors to stir up Mr. John Charters, who for some time past had strangely ignored all correspondence on the subject of Torthorwald, which, truth to say, in his present troubles, was at times forgotten by the knight.

We have said elsewhere that by some strange inversion of his mind, Sir Jahleel had felt on one occasion almost inclined to dislike the child he was compelled to wrong so foully; but now he had become unusually tender, kind, and pitiful to Dolly, whose awful future with Joab Scrowle he could not contemplate with anything like calmness or patience, though he pictured it with dismay—her dowry, the price of Joab’s silence, wasted, as it was sure to be, in riotous living—her life a living death, till broken in health, in heart and soul, an early demise ended it, and all through *him*!

How different was the fate he had hoped for Dolly in her married life as the wife of Vincent Sheldon—a life to her so fenced round and protected by the latter, so guarded by honour, and so sheltered by love, that no evil could assail it.

Joab Scrowle was certainly unlike any other *fiancé* in the world. He had no loving confabs with his intended about their future; no suggestions to make; no plan to adjust about house or furniture, or where, when, or how to settle; no view of travelling anywhere (save when he spitefully suggested Rotterdam); no presents to give or to get; no friends whom he could invite, and a hundred other *minutiæ* of the situation never occurred to him, or were thought of by the luckless Dolly.

He had but one idea on the subject; to get married, and, to use his own eloquent phrase, ‘collar the blunt.’

Dolly had never—though told by her father that it was inevitable—been able to project her mind into the supposed time when she was to be his wife—the victim—of Scrowle, bound by a legal band of iron to a wretch as the price of his silence ; and now that she was on the eve of freedom, as the evening closed in, her young blood began to course like lightning through her veins, and she thought only of the triumph of eluding him, and revenging herself and Vincent upon him ; and for a time forgot the peril in which she was too probably plunging her father. For weeks past she had felt as if on the brink of some fathomless abyss—no hope above, ruin and death below !

The sun was setting, and she began to think of her preparations for flight, when suddenly there came a gentle knock on her door, which she had locked, an unusual circumstance, but Dolly was excused many unusual things now.

‘ Who is there ? ’ she asked.

‘ I, ’ replied Violet.

‘ Excuse me, dear Violet, but I am awfully sleepy, ’ said Dolly, though she never felt more wakeful in her life.

‘ Excuse you ? of course, Dolly dear, if you are not ill ! ’

‘ Ill, no. I have not been so well for a long time ; yet I am sleepy, and have a headache. ’

‘ Can Ricochette do anything for you—your hair, or so forth ? ’

‘ No, nothing. I have done it myself. ’

‘ You have had no dinner, Dolly. ’

‘ I forgot, and don’t want it. ’

‘ Then good-night. ’

‘ Good-night, and God bless you, dear Violet, ’ replied Dolly, in a voice choked with tears, for she loved Violet as her own soul.

‘ We are going to the evening service at church. I shall pray for you, dear. ’

Violet departed, greatly to the relief of Dolly, who feared that if she opened the door she might have remained, and so marred all her plans. Before her was her dressing-table littered with handsome jewel-cases—for she had a larger collection than girls

of eighteen usually have—with other pretty miscellaneous trifles, the gifts of her father, her sisters, and of Vincent Sheldon.

As for jewels, she would take nothing with her but her engagement-ring—so soon to be exchanged for another !

Ornaments and all manner of girlish prettinesses she had in plenty ; there lay before her a sapphire cross, the stones large, lustrous, and perfect in their azure tint—a cross a queen might wear, with a necklet to match, the gift of her father on her last birthday ; but she resolved to take nothing save what was simply necessary. With tears she thought of the alarm and dismay of Kate and Violet, when her flight or disappearance was discovered in the morning, especially when the latter came, as she always did now, to kiss and awake her ; for Dolly was long of going to sleep in her grief—and she pictured the face of Violet when she found the bed unslept in and its usual occupant flown—if she did not discover it sooner, as they occupied the same apartment.

Had she peered out into the half-darkened corridor on which the latter opened, she might have seen a face, with ears pricked forward listening, with a savage, snarling mouth, and greenish, almost phosphorescent-like eyes—the face of Joab Scrowle on the watch, for the apartment in which he took his repose was in the same corridor, though at some distance from her own, and a shudder always pervaded her each time she passed the door that led to it.

At this hour he was usually to be found in the smoking-room, lounging back on a divan, with his heels on the table, a short black pipe in his mouth, and a glass of stiff grog beside him ; but now, here he was on guard, his eyes, with their greenish glitter, piercing the shadow in which he lurked, watching and listening, frequently tapping his red nose with his forefinger, and from time to time taking his short pipe from his mouth and spitting vigorously—a practice he had, to the horror of all, the housemaids included ; but this time he squirted his saliva full in the face of a portrait that hung opposite him—a figure in armour, picked up somewhere, and intended to pass for an ancestor of the Jermyn family in the time to come.

Having overheard all that had passed in the labyrinth, he was now on the watch, resolved that, happen what might, Miss Dolly should not go forth alone that night at least.

‘What fun ! what a lark !’ thought he, as he imagined Vincent Sheldon waiting and watching in breathless impatience for one who would not or could not come !

Should he let loose the great dog that guarded the terrace, and set him abroad in the grounds ? But fearing to do this lest the dog, who had a great hostility to him, might snap at himself, he deemed it better to watch Dolly closely ; though another malevolent idea occurred to him, of firing a brace of barrels loaded with small shot into the labyrinth.

Meanwhile, in her nervous excitement, Dolly at times walked up and down her room—up and down like a caged animal—her soul now filled alternately with sorrowful alarm and ineffable joy—alarm for her father, and joy for herself and Vincent.

Then she would fling herself on her knees by her bedside—the bed she would perhaps sleep in no more—and with her white hands interlaced above her head, pour forth a passionate prayer—for never was a warm and impulsive little heart more tormented than hers ! But now the time for departure had come ! Her sisters were yet absent at church, though very near, and Vincent was already waiting her at the labyrinth, or Maze, as it was usually called. How wildly her pulses beat as in haste with both hands she smoothed back the thick ripples of her golden hair above her shell-like ears, and donned her hat and veil. She tied a soft cravat of lace round her slender neck, and threw on her furred cloak, as she would have to travel by night, by the last train, no doubt, to London. Casting a glance of farewell round the room till it rested chiefly on the couch of Violet, she concealed a little hand-bag, containing all she required, under her cloak, and stole into the corridor to find herself face to face with—Joab Scrowle !

‘Such a fetching get-up !’ exclaimed the latter in his slangy v, while rubbing his damp hands together, and in the exube-

rance of his malignant joy dancing on each leg alternately ; 'dressed out this way, one might think you were going to slope, my dear.'

'Slope, Mr. Scrowle? I do not understand you,' replied Dolly, trembling with anger, disappointment, and dismay.

'Well, *elope* ; perhaps that is nearer the mark,' said he, with a grin, and a flash in his green and bloodshot eyes.

'What do you mean, sir?' she asked, while proceeding to descend the staircase.

'Precisely what I say, my dear,' said he, following her closely. 'Where are you going at this hour?'

'Into the grounds for a walk.'

'Alone?'

'Alone, if I choose.'

'Ah! But I don't choose.'

'Would you dare to prevent me?' asked Dolly, in growing anger and fear.

'How pretty you look, when your little temper is up,' said Scrowle, as he deliberately seized her by the wrist, and drawing her into the lighted-up library, shut the door, and placed his back against it.

'Do you dare to control my movements, sir?' asked Dolly, repressing with difficulty a desire to scream.

'Who has a better right to do so? Now, don't let us quarrel,' said Scrowle, as he rubbed his coarse and hideous hands together ; 'who could look on you without admiring you, even in your present bitter mood ; or who could admire without loving you, as your own Joab does?'

Dolly shuddered and drew back a pace, for she saw he was under the influence of recent potations.

'You might love me,' continued Scrowle, who saw with intense pleasure that such language as this enraged and stung her most ; 'learn to love me, just a little, if you choose, and then you would be my own Dolly, or Adolphine, if you prefer to be called so,' he added, leering at her with his head on each side alternately.

'Please to say no more,' urged the girl piteously.

'You are my own Dolly, then?'

She glanced wildly round her; could she but reach a window, by a cry she would summon Vincent to her aid, but they were all shuttered and barred securely, being on the entrance floor.

'Stand back, sir, and permit me to pass,' she exclaimed, as a glance at the clock on the marble mantelpiece showed how the precious time was running on.

'Don't excite yourself, my chosen pet—your father's gift to me—for I will persevere till I win your heart—or break it!' he added, as a most unloverlike glance came into his cruel and cunning eyes.

'Oh!' moaned Dolly, pressing her hands on her heart, 'Yes—yes! till you came, wretch—Vincent and I were happy—oh, so happy—like the King and Queen of a Lotus Island!' she added to herself in a low and broken voice.

'Don't know where that island is,' said her tormentor; 'I've heard of Eel Pie Island, and the Isle of Dogs; but, anyhow, it is well to be off with the old love before you are on with the *new*; so, where do you want to go to now, at this time of night? Why didn't you go to church with your sisters, and hear that bonby Mr. Octave Bede exhort you to be penitent in due and orthodox form?'

'Why do you, sir, dare to remind me of a duty you never perform yourself?' she asked: for the profound insolence of this man daring to address her thus in her father's house exasperated while it appalled her.

'I choose my road to heaven or hell, so what does it matter to you?' he asked, so brutally and spitefully, that she shivered and cowered as if he had struck her, which she actually feared he was about to do. 'Now, don't be angry with its own Joab; and don't be frightened, my pretty poppet, my chickabiddy, my tooral-ooral-lay! You'll have to marry me, whether you care for me or not,' said he, attempting to take her hand, and adopting a tone and manner alike mocking.

'Vile and odious wretch!' shrieked Dolly; 'don't touch me, on't come near me!'

She glanced at the clock ; the hour hand was approaching ten now ! Scrowle saw the action, and grasped her tender wrists in his clumsy clutch. His hot and tainted breath was on her cheek ; his hideous and cadaverous face was close to hers : she was helpless, and no aid was nigh. She bowed her head and closed her eyes, as she wailed out : ‘ Oh, God—I shall die !’

‘ No, you won’t,’ snarled her tormentor contemptuously.

But a new and savage mood suddenly seized him as he roughly thrust her from him.

‘ Take care !’ he exclaimed fiercely ; ‘ you thought to give me the slip for good and all to-night, did you ? But take care, I say,’ he continued huskily and hoarsely, with his clenched hand close to her pallid face ; ‘ you don’t know Joab Scrowle yet ! You love your father, I suppose ? Well, by a word spoken before a beak—perhaps you don’t know what a beak is ?—well, a magistrate—I could drag your old governor out of his fine house, away from you all, and send him, with his hair—or what remains of it—cropped close, and clad in a prison suit, with a number on it, for the remainder of his life to hard labour, as a rogue, a vagabond, and a felon ; so *beware*—*BEWARE*, I say, and none of your fine airs with me ! Draw it mild, or it will be the worse for you, and it all rests with yourself to save the old devil from a dog’s death !’

Her tormentor snapped his fingers, and contemplated her with a scowl of intense malignity and triumph, while her heart seemed to shrink and wither up within her. Then a shrill shriek, extorted by mental agony, escaped Dolly, and she fell forward on her face. In this position she was found by Ricochette, whose still shriller cries roused the whole household, who, with terror and dismay, heard her exclaim :

‘ Oh, Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu, le pauvre enfant ! Made-moiselle Dolly *is dead* !’

Scrowle regarded his victim pitilessly, and while the sympathetic footmen and others clenched their hands with vague intentions of hostility, he betook himself, as stated, to the

pantry of Mr. Tapleigh, to 'refresh himself' after his favourite fashion, and to growl, swear, and threaten with dire vengeance certain persons he did not name; and meantime grooms and servants, mounted, were despatched in hot haste to Brighton for medical aid; and in this turmoil the house was found by Kate and Violet on their return from church.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

EVENTS PROGRESS.

IGNORANT of all that had transpired at Barons Hall, Vincent Sheldon, after lingering some days at Brighton in great doubt and perplexity, returned to London. There no letters from Dolly, sent through Ricochette, as he had fondly hoped, awaited him. The French girl, scared just then by a dread of compromising herself, sent no reply to the several epistles he wrote her craving for information. Thus it was through Douglas that he obtained the principal tidings that Dolly was ill, confined to bed; and though he knew not the immediate cause of her indisposition, he did not wonder at it, after all she had undergone. But it was maddening to know that while she was prostrated thus through terror on the one hand and love for himself on the other, he was banished from her side, that she might actually die and he not be with her. In his secret thoughts he bitterly reviled her father, and had some rather sanguinary views concerning Mr. Joab Scrowle.

'What was he to do?' he asked himself helplessly and miserably; 'what was his duty?—was he bound to obey Sir Jahleel, or force his way into Barons Hall in defiance of him?'

But for Douglas, who soothed him, the impetuous lover would assuredly have been guilty of some rashness, for his position was no ordinary one; and old Mr. Sheldon, by his bitter and rancorous attacks on Sir Jahleel for the strangeness of his conduct, and what he deemed wanton cruelty to a pair of young lovers, rather inflamed and incited him to action.

Douglas took Sheldon with him to Richmond. They dined

in the old coffee-room of the Star and Garter, in the recess of that spacious oriel that looks down upon that fair and sweetly sylvan valley through which old Father Thames winds between groves of coppice, his current all silver, blended with the gold of the setting sun, and lingering over their wine and cigars, the pair waxed confidential, yet Sheldon utterly failed to get Douglas to talk much of himself. From the bay window wherein they sat, Douglas could see in the distance the house and grounds of Lady Bassett, Sir Henry Honeywood's sister, and now the day—never to be forgotten—that he had spent there with Violet—the day of the garden *fête*—came vividly and painfully back to his memory.

'What,' thought Vincent, as he remarked the high bearing and face of Douglas, 'can this fellow's story be, what his *past*, what the scheme of his future? There is such a strange dash of poetry and chivalry, with a certain Bohemian recklessness, about him, yet tempered by an extreme method and order withal.'

And then Vincent recurred with fresh bitterness to his own affairs.

'Have patience yet a while,' said Douglas; 'grief doesn't kill, as a general rule. Dolly is young—a mere girl, in fact; her spirits are elastic, and health will come back with hope.'

'And when it does come back,' sighed Vincent, 'what will your advice be *then*?'

'As it was before.'

'To run off with her?'

'Yes.'

'And this secret of her father, whatever it may be?'

'That is his affair, not hers. A flight unknown to him, unconnived at by him, and so completely without his consent, can in no way compromise him, even with this reptile Scrowle.'

'Give me your hand, Douglas,' exclaimed Sheldon with ardour, as he drained his glass.

'I should like to see you well through this business before I leave London.'

'Leave London—for where?'

'That I scarcely know yet,' replied Douglas, twirling his thick black moustache, with his dark eyes fixed dreamily on the shining windings of the river; 'but leave it I shall, and this occupation of quill-driving.'

'Your secretaryship?'

'Yes.'

'And all chances of Violet?'

'I have none. When last in town Sir Jahleel's manner to me was intolerable. He seemed a mass of suspicion—I know not of what—and I think of volunteering for the Cape. I am restless, sick of this aimless existence, and have longings and wishes for another and a brighter life.'

'But to volunteer for the Cape!'

'Yes.'

'Good heavens, Douglas, to become a private soldier?'

'Perhaps, if I cannot make a better of it,' replied Douglas, laughing; 'I hinted as much to Sir Jahleel myself.'

'And he——'

'Seemed rather delighted with the idea.'

'How does his peerage case come on?'

'As well as ever,' said Douglas, laughing. 'What a figure he would cut in the coronet and robes of a peer! The last letter he received from his Scotch friend, or agent, Mr. John Charters, rather upset him, hence, perhaps, his rudeness to me. It contained a curious passage to this effect—"A dreadful mistake has been made, which has upset all our plans, and which I cannot yet explain; but if matters are yet arranged, as I fully hope they may be, the title of Torthorwald will be secured to your family in perpetuity, I hope."'

'A mistake—what does he mean?'

'I cannot tell.'

'And he cut up rough, you say?'

'With me, rather—and I don't like it. I have endured a good deal for the sake of Violet; but to me she is now a thing of the past,' added Douglas, in an unsteady voice.

'Now look here, Douglas,' said Vincent Sheldon earnestly, 'the idea you have suddenly conceived of throwing up your appointment and casting your bread upon the waters, as it were, is—pardon me for saying so—a very wild one, and I beseech you to reconsider it as a friend. I am wealthy, and my people are so; this I may say without boast; thus, if I can assist you in any way——'

'Thanks, a thousand thanks,' replied, or rather interrupted Douglas, kindly but haughtily, while his olive cheek reddened; 'but this must not be.'

'Do you despise friendship?'

'Far from it.'

'Money, then?'

'No; I am not about to say that I don't value money, because I *do*. I have known poverty—worst of all, genteel poverty—and can fully appreciate the value of a good fortune; but, situated as I am, no money that I do not fairly earn shall ever enter my pocket. But again I say a thousand thanks to you. Here is to our next merry meeting,' he added, draining his glass; 'and when you come to enact the part of young Lochinvar, I shall be your henchman.'

The morning after the eventful night we have recorded at Barons Hall saw Dolly prostrated with a feverish illness, difficult to name or define, as it was more mental than bodily. She knew that when the same time came on the next evening, Vincent Sheldon would again be waiting for her in blind desperation at the trysting-place, and she could make him no sign, send him no message; that she was helpless and could only weep on her pillow, though strongly tempted to confide in Violet, and ask her to go in her place and tell him all that had occurred: but a dread that Vincent in his fury might subject Scrowle to some condign punishment repressed her.

But Dolly was ill indeed, and she, unlike the parent whose victim she was, and who clung to this life and all the good things thereof, only longed for death as a relief and escape; yet Dolly had too much of vitality in her nature to find it. She knew that

her movements would be sharply watched by Scrowle in the future, and more than ever did she feel him to be her evil genius.

Where was now the bright fairy vista through which in her heart as a young girl she beheld her future life, hand in hand with a young fellow so winsome and loving as Vincent Sheldon?

A pallor like that of death was settling over her delicate face, and when she essayed to articulate a prayer her confused thoughts refused to form one, and her lips to utter it if formed.

A heavy weight seemed to oppress, to crush her heart. Times there were when she could neither weep nor think, and when she was able to leave her bed, some days after, she paced her room, or the most secluded part of the garden, with steps that were feeble, slow, and unsteady; and often she raised her eyes and her slender interlaced hands to the blue sky above, mutely appealing to Heaven for the help that was denied her here.

It wrung the hearts of her sisters, the exceeding grief, mortification, and pain of this tender young flower, but they, like Sir Jahleel, were powerless, and the bewildered Mr. Octave Bede dared not lift up his voice in the matter.

Often Violet wept and wrung her hands at the thought of Dolly—poor little Dolly, a gentle creature, a blossom that had grown under the genial sunshine of wealth, prosperity, happiness, and gaiety, and lastly with the love of Vincent, being now in a condition so pitiable, with the shadow of a great and maddening horror hanging over her—a shadow that deepened day by day; while Joab Scrowle, a tyrant and a bully, felt himself master of the entire situation, and exulted that he could sway and control the destiny of the Jermyn family, that he could live in clover and squeeze the bloated purse of Sir Jahleel.

The latter was deeply concerned on his return to find Dolly so prostrated in mind and body, and he received from Ricochette a very florid account of the outrageous conduct of Scrowle in the library; but it only filled him with a just emotion of wrath to which he dared not give vent.

He found that his private secretary had been absent from his

post all that day and the day preceding. Moreover, he had passed him—or it might be his ‘double’—at the Brighton Railway Station. Thus, in the fever of his mind, he, as usual, mentally connected him, in some mysterious way, with Scrowle in the recent event; and his rage at and fear of Douglas were increased to a dangerous extent, and he could only hope that the hints the latter had lately given of quitting London might lead to a severance between the conspirators—if such they were. He writhed amid the fretful atmosphere of mistrust, alarm, peril, and sorrow in which he found himself and his favourite daughter plunged; and yet he had not the courage to end it all, mercifully to her and his other two girls, in the stern old Roman fashion.

‘And so you meant to run away from us and elope, Mr. Scrowle asserts?’ said he.

‘But it was with Vincent, papa,’ replied Dolly, with white and quivering lips.

‘And thus destroy me—leave us all at the mercy of that man—leave us to disgrace and death!’

‘Papa, papa! Do not taunt me. I cannot endure much now. Think of all I have undergone already!’ she exclaimed, with a passionate burst of tears, as she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. The tears, too, stood in his eyes, as he returned her affectionate caress. ‘Forgive me, papa; but I felt too young to die.’

‘Die?’

‘Yes. To be compelled to marry that man means death! I shall drown myself if he does not kill me,’ she continued wildly.

‘Get well and strong, my darling,’ he replied, to soothe her. ‘Well and strong, and we may see our way out of this dreadful coil, after all; meantime, I will endeavour to rid you, for a while, of the obnoxious presence of Mr. Scrowle.’

‘Oh, papa! can you do so?’

‘God be merciful to us, yes, dear Dolly. Now go upstairs to your room, and lie a time on your bed; you look weary, child.’

‘And I am so, papa. Oh, so weary!’ She kissed him again, with that peculiar tenderness which had become habitual to her of late with reference to her father, as she saw how crushed he was in heart, how wrung in soul by the secret—the fatal power that Scrowle possessed over him.

‘So Douglas talks of giving up his secretaryship, papa says,’ observed Kate to Violet, whose change of colour evinced the interest his name could still excite in her.

‘For what reason?’

‘I do not know.’

‘For what purpose, then?’

‘That can matter little to us, so that papa gets handsomely rid of him. But I believe he spoke of becoming a volunteer at the Cape of Good Hope.’

‘Does he love me so little, or that *other* woman (who, I suppose, has been false to him) so much, that he is about to adopt a resolution so wild?’ said Violet.

‘What can it matter to you, Violet?’ asked the relentless Kate; ‘it is but too probable the golden-haired damsel with whom we saw him will be his companion in the colony.’

These tidings gave Violet much cause for thought, nor were they a less cause of thought to her father.

The latter, on mature reflection, began to think that he had made Douglas too much of a bogey. If it was the intention of his secretary to quit the country thus, he could not be the lost heir (to his knowledge, at least), nor could he be in league with Scrowle. For a time, therefore, Sir Jahleel began to gather a little courage. Kate’s hope that Douglas might go—and go away for ever—before there was the most remote chance of Violet discovering how she had been imposed upon, was intense; but, in her own hardness of heart, she was altogether unconscious how her softer sister clung to the pleasant memory of the love-dream which had been so cruelly dissipated on that eventful day at the Marine Parade.

Never more would their voices be attuned together in *La ci*

darem la mano, and many another sweet duet; never more would she feel the delight of finding his mind and her own in perfect harmony, as if they were twin-born spirits—each understanding the other so thoroughly, and always one in thought; and even, when their conversation flagged, each could feel that the other's silence was sweeter than words, as they sat hand-in-hand and eye-to-eye together. All that now could never be again! She now realised to the full the painful conviction that the mass of people 'are the tools of circumstances—thistle-down on the breeze, straw on the river, their course is shaped for them by the currents and eddies of the stream of life.'

Sir Jahleel, while filling up a cheque under the usual pressure to replenish the exchequer of Mr. Joab Scrowle—taking courage, as we have said—actually ventured to hint that a time must come when an end should be put to this extortion under which he groaned.

'So it will, when your girl's money is handed over to me with herself,' was the deliberate reply.

'A hundred thousand pounds—to you—to such as you!' said Sir Jahleel, in a husky whisper.

'Precisely—a hundred thousand pounds as the price of my not peaching and providing you with a handsome suit all over with broad-arrows—d'ye twig?'

Sir Jahleel started, and turning his white and quivering face to Scrowle, said, in a stern and measured voice: 'I do not know what prevents me from accusing you of drowning Selby's boy—his hat was found near the pond, and you were seen in the vicinity.'

'Your proofs that he *was* drowned?'

'Yours that he exists?'

'Who was to gain by his death or abduction—you or I? Come, come, you old bloke; don't let us begin to accuse each other now, lest when rogues fall out—you know the rest.'

'Can you produce young Philip Selby—I ask you for the hundredth time?'

'You wouldn't thank me for doing so, but I could do so in two hours, though it should place us both in the dock.'

'And with the peculiar mother's mark on his body?'

'Exactly so.'

'How am I to know that it may not have been manufactured—tattooed in some way?'

Scrowle thought the idea not a bad one; but keeping it to himself, he resumed his bullying tone.

'Another word of all this, and within an hour I blow the whole thing on you, before the Mayor of Brighton, or the nearest justice of the peace. You have a character to lose—I have none!'

Sir Jahleel groaned heavily, and filled up the cheque—an open one, as Mr. Scrowle was not the possessor of a bank account—with a very tremulous hand; and in presenting it, begged the recipient, whose eyes gleamed with avarice and triumphant malice, to take up his quarters in Brighton for a few days, or anywhere he chose, out of Barons Hall, as his presence there seriously retarded Dolly's recovery.

'As you please,' growled Scrowle; 'I am a little tired of your grand ways here, and have no objection to go on the loose for a while. But she'll need to get used to me in time, I tell you!'

'Oh, Lord—oh, Lord!' thought Sir Jahleel; 'to fancy my Dolly's future—the long years, perhaps, of her wasted life—the years that I, thank Heaven, can never see!'

Scrowle read something of his thoughts in the expression of his face.

'She shall marry me when I come back, or I shall know the reason why!' said he, while carefully depositing the cheque in the recesses of a dirty old pocket-book. 'I'll return when this is spent and claim my bond, as Shakespeare says—my pound of flesh!'

Sir Jahleel knew the wretch meant 'Shylock,' but cared not to correct him; and Scrowle took his departure, grinding his teeth and muttering—'Curse her pride, and her cunning too! But I'll break her heart yet!'

And, aware of the narrow chance he had so nearly run of losing his victim, and, more than all, her money, Scrowle resolved soon to bring matters to a very sharp and decided issue with Sir Jahleel, to have 'no more dilly-dallying;' and, if Dolly's illness continued, he would have the banns put up, and get the Reverend Octave Bede, or any other parson, to perform the marriage ceremony even at her bedside!

To the great relief of all in Barons Hall, their incubus remained in Brighton for some days, till suddenly there came the refreshing news that he had met with a dreadful accident!

'An accident,' thought Kate—'if he dies, then we are rid of him!'

'But if he died,' thought Sir Jahleel, 'what might he not reveal on his death-bed?'

And in an instant he began to anticipate with terror and shame the revelations with which, in every form of exaggeration, the newspapers might teem.

'Oh, mon Dieu—oh, Mademoiselle Dolly,' exclaimed Ricochette, rushing into the room of the latter, 'good news for you! *Je vous félicite de tout mon cœur!*'

'On what, Ricochette—on what?'

'About Monsieur Scrowle.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Dolly, shrinking back.

'He has met with a frightful accident at the Cavalry Barracks, and is now in the soldier's hospital with both legs broken. Are you not delighted, mademoiselle?'

'Both legs broken?'

'Yes—would it were his neck!' responded the merciless Ricochette.

'How came this about?'

'What does it matter?'

'How came the news?'

'Sir Harry Honeywood's valet rode over here this morning with some music for Mademoiselle Violet, and assured me that

dem, as he scraped a vesta on his spurred heel and lit his Havana. 'Are you content to dangle about her for ever—at least, as long as we honour Brighton with our presence—a dog to fetch and carry—to bestow bouquets and music—lose gloves and all sorts of things on bets, and be alternately patronised and laughed at by the daughter of an old City man ?'

'Nay, nay—you go too far,' replied Sir Harry, a little annoyed, all the more so that the fashionable Tom Tandem's father had made his money as a breeder of horses in one of the shires ; and, moreover, he was painfully conscious of one feature in his renewed intimacy with Violet Jermyn, that she seemed, by her tone and bearing, to have utterly forgotten that he had ever proposed to her. 'Yet I think she likes me,' he added simply, after draining another glass of brandy-and-water.

'Likes you—well, isn't that half the battle ?' queried Tandem, who had a great desire to quiz.

'No.'—'Why ?'

'It is only because she knows that I like *her*, and she seems to view me in a calm sisterly way that is very aggravating.'

'Well, I should treat her with brotherly indifference, and that would pique her fast enough—never knew it fail !' said Mr. Puxleigh, otherwise Puck, who had been about six months in the service.

'Has she a fancy for anyone else ?' continued Tandem, beginning to cross-question Honeywood.

'Well, I have sometimes thought that—that—Douglas——'

'Douglas—the cad ?' interrupted Bramley sharply.

'You mistake,' said Sir Harry, with equal sharpness ; 'Douglas is no cad ! You do not know of whom you speak : I do—poor fellow !'

'As you please,' replied Bramley, twisting his moustache, and with some *hauteur* of manner, as he had imbibed more than he should have done before dinner. 'Anyway, I shall not quarrel with you about him, Harry. But, old fellow, what the deuce has come to you ?—you look very strange to-day.'

'I do feel a little out of sorts, Bramley.'

'No wonder! Late dinners at the Pavilion and everywhere else; hard smoking and queer mixtures to clear your mouth of nicotine, and all that sort of thing.'

'Not at all, my dear fellow.'

'What then?'—'I have had a very odd adventure.'

'With a girl?'—No; I wish it had been.'

'With whom or what then?'—'That is more than I can tell you.'

'Harry, have you been drinking?'

'Put him through his facings!' roared Puck.

'Not able to tell,' said Tandem, taking the cigar from his lips and staring at his friend; 'have you seen a ghost? You do look put out, rather.'

'Not a ghost; but I am half-inclined to think I have seen something worse.'

'What the deuce could be worse than a ghost, especially if it is such as that which haunts the 17th Lancers!' exclaimed Bramley, laughing.

Honeywood's present companions were about the last to whom he should have confided the anecdote, so strange and gruesome, that he was about to tell; but his mind—not a great one certainly—was full, and for the life of him he could not help speaking of it.

'I'll tell you a deuced curious story of what happened to *me* and the Catholic chaplain yesterday afternoon,' said he; 'mean-time, Puck, mix me another jorum of that brew. Thanks; you're a good fellow. You all remember Tim O'Maloney of ours, who was in my troop and was pensioned off just after our return from India?'

'Perfectly,' said Tandem; 'he was one of the wildest devils in the regiment, and never out of scrapes. Even getting married did not tame him. Yet he was never known to miss mass or any particular service of his Church.'

'Well, when returning from Barons Hall yesterday evening in my dogcart, I met our old Catholic chaplain tramping in hot

may be the worse for you both!" said the hag menacingly, while her eyes blazed like two live coals.

"I will not go back till I have seen Tim, come what may!" exclaimed the chaplain firmly and angrily. "There is something suspicious in all this that passes my comprehension. Let us drive on, in the name of God!"

'Suddenly snatching the whip from my hand, he dealt a furious cut across the flanks of the exasperated mare, which shot along the road like a mad thing. A shrill yet mocking shriek escaped the woman. I looked back, expecting to see her lying maimed and bloody on the dusty path, but could see nothing of her. She had vanished as suddenly as she had appeared. And now all my powers as a whip were required to prevent the mare from tearing past the old pensioner's little cottage, to the door of which she brought us by a few bounds.

'The door of the humble abode was thrown open, and there stood Tim's wife in tears and sorrow, yet with a face full of intense gratitude to the priest—an old and withered face, which I remembered well; and yet, though modified in feature and expression, it was most startlingly like that of the furious hag we had encountered a few minutes before.

'The priest was as bewildered as myself; but as there was no time for inquiries then, he leaped down and entered the cottage, while I remained at the door on foot, endeavouring to soothe the mare.

"I am in time then, Biddy?" I heard the priest say.

"Glory be to God, your reverence is—it is the hand of death that is heavy on my poor Tim!"

"But for the lift Sir Harry gave me, I would have been too late," I heard him say; and then I heard the grateful Biddy's fluent Irish tongue pouring out blessings on me.

"Has the doctor seen Tim?"

"It is all no use, no use," sobbed the woman; "death is here, and I might as well strive to keep out the wind. Your reverence is the only doctor for him now."

"Then who was that that came to meet me on the road, and sought to bar my way?"—"Sorry one o' me knows."

"What! was she not your sister?"

"I never had a sister in my life. I sent no one to meet you, sir; and till I came for your reverence this afternoon I have never left Tim's bedside for weeks."

'I remained waiting patiently for the chaplain for fully an hour, and ere that time had passed I knew by the louder and deeper wailing of the woman that all was over.'

'Then he came forth, softly closed the door, and took his seat beside me in silence.'

"So my old trooper is gone," said I.

"Yes," said he. "Tim's trials are over—God rest him, poor fellow! I have closed his eyes and left him in peace, with the old woman praying by his bedside."

"Who was the woman we met on the road?"

"*Who*, indeed?" replied the chaplain, as perplexed as myself.

'The mare passed the spot where we had seen her with ears flat on her head, and at a jerky gallop, as if anxious to leave it behind. Nor was the animal quite pacified till I had her stabled at the barracks. I could extract nothing on the subject from the chaplain, who seemed sunk in reflections of his own.'

'A strange story, indeed,' said Tandem, regarding Sir Harry's unusually grave face with a curious and incredulous expression.

'Now, what do you think of it, Tom?' asked the latter.

'Think—why you must have met her twin sister.'

'The woman has not a relation in the world.'

'Then who was it?'

'Ay, there is the rub—"who was it?" as the chaplain said; and I have no doubt he thinks we met the devil, come to bar his last ministrations to a dying sinner.'

'Oh, bosh!' cried Tommy Puck, 'that is coming it *too* strong!'

'Perhaps he had two wives, this O'Maloney—many fellows have!' remarked Bramley.

'Well, but he couldn't have two as much alike as two eggs

or two bullets !' said Honeywood, angry with himself for having told the story at all ; and he was not sorry when the subject was changed by the appearance of an odd-looking little man, in an ill-made black suit and high shiny hat, who was defending himself with a baggy umbrella—a veritable gamp !—in the barrack-yard against the vicious attacks of a large bull-terrier.

'Sir Harry,' exclaimed Tandem, 'your dog Boxer seems to have taken a special fancy to the calves of that fellow's legs ; his teeth will soon find the most fleshy part !'

'Go it, Boxer ; good dog, good dog,' shouted Tommy Puck from the window.

'By Jove, it is that brute Scrowle—Joab Scrowle !' exclaimed Bramley, as with a face expressive of mingled rage and fear that personage looked helplessly up at the window—rage at the laughter of some hussars who were looking on and fear of the dog ; but it was a peculiarity of Mr. Scrowle that all dogs were at enmity with him.

Sir Harry whistled off the dog, and sent Tandem's servant to ask Joab to walk up and join them in a glass of wine and a cigar.

'Now that we've got that cur in the barracks, we'll be the death of him,' was the somewhat merciless remark of Major Tandem, who had a particular antipathy for Scrowle, born of the mysterious power he so evidently wielded at Barons Hall.

'Right, let us have him up,' said Tommy Puck ; 'make him as drunk as Bacchus, and then leave the rest to me. I'll tie him on Honeywood's mare and set him at the bars in the riding school.'

'How can the Jermyns tolerate the presence of such an utter toad as that fellow ?' said Bramley.

'Heaven alone knows,' said Sir Harry ; 'he is as rich as a Jew, no doubt—is a relation of some kind, and has led to a quarrel with young Sheldon. No doubt his money has something to do with it ; but to me it seems that he has taken Sheldon's place.'

'Oh, impossible !'

'Fact, though. _ I often wish the girl would run away. I am

sure my sister, Lady Bassett, would hide her at Richmond or in Paris till the storm blew past, and Scrowle had drunk himself to death.'

'What the deuce brings him loafing about the barrack yard?' said Tandem.

'To take the Queen's shilling,' suggested Tommy Puck.

'Scarcely; between short service, linked battalions, cramming, and exercise, the service is at a low ebb enough; but she is not reduced to such bad bargains as Joab Scrowle,' said Honeywood, laughing, as a hussar ushered in the subject of their remarks, whom he supposed to be a bailiff, or money-lender, or some such reptile.

CHAPTER XXX.

SCROWLE'S ACCIDENT.

By all save Sir Harry, who had become rather taciturn, but more especially by Mr. Puxleigh, Joab Scrowle was welcomed with great *empressement*, as they had fully resolved to have 'a lark' with him, though in what precise mode none then exactly knew; but he was at once pressed to take a seat, a cigar, and glass of brandy and seltzer, all of which he readily accepted, though it was pretty evident that he had been partaking already of various stimulants, and was considerably excited thereby, and also by his recent encounter with the bull terrier.

He had been idling for some days about Brighton, with a big cheque in his pocket; he had not been sorry, perhaps, to get away for a time from the monotonous splendour of Barons Hall—the fretfulness of Sir Jahleel, the cutting contempt of Kate, the unconcealed aversion of Violet, the terror of Dolly, and the loathing of all—and to be able to indulge himself in his old and favourite ways, whatever they were, but into which we have not deemed it necessary to follow him.

Dolly's illness did not in the least grieve Mr. Scrowle, though her loathing occasionally piqued and infuriated him; and while

resolving not to abate one jot of what he deemed his right, or rather his usurped power over Sir Jahleel, he had set out to walk and have, as he phrased it, 'a good think' over the matter, and while doing so had unconsciously walked near the barracks.

'Drain your glass, Mr. Scrowle,' said Tandem, 'you look faint; I hope the dog didn't bite you.'

'I took care it didn't,' replied Scrowle, draining at a bumper his tumbler, which was instantly, and very potently, refilled by Puck. 'Faint! I don't know why I should look so; I have had sundry grogs at more than one restorant,' he added, nervously rolling up his handkerchief in a ball as usual. 'Rather tip-top stuff this, after one has been used to much blue gin and yellow fog; eh, Sir Harry?'

Honeywood made no reply, but eyed Scrowle as if he had been a species of natural curiosity, and the latter continued to drain his glasses of brandy and seltzer as fast as Puck, who sat at his elbow, filled them, and to puff heavily the strongest cigars, which were also selected for him by the same friendly sub-lieutenant, whose handsome young face was bright with frolic and mischief.

As intoxication came fast upon Scrowle, he muttered all manner of strange things about Dolly and her hundred thousand pounds, of Douglas, and having Sir Jahleel under his thumb; of bitter threats against the latter; of Selby's heir, and of Rotterdam; about all of which the Hussars could make nothing, though at times he provoked their laughter, especially when he enforced his incoherences by patting the side of his nose with his finger, and vigorously slapping his cheek; but after a time his vulgarity bored rather than amused them, and leaving him to continue his potations, they entered into discussion among themselves on a comparison between a run with the Pytchley and the Brighton Harriers, to which he listened with fixed eye and relaxed jaw, till Tommy Puck, perceiving him to be, as he called it, 'tight as a drum,' proposed to paint him pea-green—all but his red nose, and then turn him into the barrack-yard—but their friendly intentions were frustrated by Scrowle tumbling

off his chair, and lying helpless on the floor, about the time the warning trumpet sounded for mess, after which they all departed, leaving him to get sober at leisure. On returning from dinner, some three hours later, they found him lying in a profound and drunken slumber, breathing stertorously, and utterly helpless.

'What the deuce is to be done?' said Major Tandem. 'I won't have this beastly fellow lying here all night. I wish, Puck, you had not thought of inviting him up here—to my quarters, at least.'

'Let him be carried to the guard-room,' said Honeywood.

'Or put in the cells,' said Bramley; 'I am captain of the day, and can manage it easily.'

'And then tell him in the morning that he has murdered some one,' suggested another practical joker.

'Or carry him into the riding-school and tuck him up to the nose in tan, where the rough rider will find him in the morning.'

'Pack him in a hamper and send him to the colonel labelled grouse.'

'I can scarcely endorse any such practical joke upon a guest or friend of Sir Jahleel's,' said Honeywood; but any little compunction he had in the matter was received with perfect indifference by the rest, and eventually it was decided, with the assistance of Tandem's valet and another hussar, to carry Scrowle to the regimental hospital, where he was stripped and put to bed, and both his legs below the knee were mercilessly splinted and bandaged up by Mr. Puck, and then he was left to get sober as best he might.

The trumpets in the echoing barrack-square announcing the *reveille*, and then the summons for stable duty, failed to break the heavy slumber of Scrowle; but when he did awake, and he began to struggle back to consciousness, his ideas of his situation and his whereabouts were certainly somewhat complicated.

The morning sun was streaming into a large and lofty apartment, the walls of which were whitewashed. On each side was a line of beds. In a moment he perceived that he was in

a hospital ; terror seized him, and this increased to a frightful extent when he found that he was incapable of movement, and that by the splints and bandages his legs were so benumbed as to be almost dead. He had an appalling headache and a raging thirst ; his tongue rattled in his mouth like a parched pea ; he was stiff, benumbed, motionless, and was only sensible that some dreadful accident had befallen him, but when, where, or how he knew not. He was clad in a sky-blue flannel night-dress, and patients similarly attired were sitting up in their beds or moving slowly about, attending on themselves or each other. To Scrowle it all appeared a horrible dream !

The appearance of an orderly in undress uniform, recalled some of the events of the preceding evening, and convinced him that he was in the ward of a military hospital, and the soldier's reply to his anxious question confirmed this.

'How was I brought here ?' he asked.

'On a stretcher, I suppose,' replied the hussar with a grin ; 'you don't think you walked, do you ?'

What had happened to him ?

'You were brought here by order of Major Tandem.'

'Why ?'

'You were riding a steeplechase at night, farked at a bull-finch, and got some of your legs smashed—that is all,' replied the hussar, who was aware of the joke his officers were playing. 'Here comes the doctor,' he added, 'and he will tell you all about it.'

As he spoke, Honeywood, Bramley, Tandem, and Tommy Puck, all in undress uniform, entered the ward, while the orderly shouted 'Attention' in a voice like thunder, and then most of the patients sat up in their beds to enjoy the fun.

An utter coward at heart, Scrowle looked at each of them imploringly, and his terror increased to see the intense gravity to which each had modelled the expression of his face.

'Keep still, Mr. Scrowle, don't move,' said Sir Harry. 'It is a bad case, I think, Tandem ?'

'Bad—couldn't be worse!' replied the major.

'How did it all happen, gentlemen?' asked Scrowle, in a weak voice.

'Can't exactly say—but you must not speak, lest you exhaust yourself,' said Captain Bramley. Scrowle groaned heavily.

'What is the row?—don't be alarmed; it will come all right in the end,' exclaimed the captain.

'In the case of a person in whom one is not very warmly interested,' says a writer, 'one always thinks it will be all right,' and some such idea occurred to Scrowle, as he gazed reproachfully at the captain, who said to the sub-lieutenant—

'What do you think of this case, Tom?'

'In all my practice as a surgeon,' replied that unblushing youth, 'I never saw a worse. In both limbs there is a fracture of the peritoneum dux, and a fearful injury to the os humerus of the pericardium,' replied Puck, with intense solemnity.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Tandem, and the others, holding up their hands, while Scrowle, on hearing these—to him—frightful and mysterious phrases, rolled his blood-shot eyes despairingly from side to side, and from face to face, as a group of patients gathered round his bed, and he thought, 'What brutes these fellows in blue flannel must be, that they seem unable to suppress their laughter in a case so serious.'

'He must be kept quiet and cool,' continued Puck, 'fed on stewed prunes and boiled spinage for some weeks after he is operated on.'

'Operated on?' groaned Scrowle inquiringly.

'Yes; all the skill in the world would not reduce your fractures—both limbs must come off,' continued Puck, throwing aside his undress uniform and rolling up his shirt sleeves. 'Corporal, order a stable bucket, a large sponge, and also a tub to hold the blood,' he added; and while the corporal departed to execute these commands, the subaltern proceeded with great deliberation to sharpen, on a poker, an enormous knife which he had procured from the cook-house.

Unbounded grew the agony and terror of Scrowle, and huge bead-drops of perspiration coursed after each other over his temples.

'Have you any prayers to say, Mr. Scrowle?' asked Major Tandem gravely.

'Prayers—for what?'

'Your sins, you old sinner,' replied Bramley.

'But why?'

'You may die under the operation,' said Puck, feeling the edge of his knife. 'Corporal, bring a hand-saw.'

'Die!' moaned Scrowle, pale now as death.

'Few fellows, my good man, are likely to survive the amputation of both legs after fractures such as yours,' said Puck; 'and then, think of the state of your blood. You were drunk as an owl last night, sir.'

'Another doctor—another doctor!' screamed Scrowle.

'You will find one doctor quite enough,' said Puck indignantly; 'surely you do not doubt my skill?'

'I doubt it very much.'

'Take courage, sir,' said Puck, with a dignified and injured air. 'I am one in whose family the science of medicine is hereditary. I am the lineal descendant of the estimable Doctor Richard Russel, that eminent physician whose work on the efficacy of sea-water founded the prosperity of Brighton, and drew hither the First Gentleman in Europe—George, Prince Regent, afterwards known as Fum the Fourth.'

'If the operation prove successful,' said Tandem, with difficulty maintaining his gravity, 'we'll get you a pair of handsome wooden legs. You have heard of the wooden walls of old England? Well, you shall figure with a pair of the wooden legs thereof.'

'His very step will have music in't,
As he comes up the stair,'

hummed Bramley.

'Or if we have to cut you higher up,' resumed Puck, 'excision of the thigh joints, say, you will have to go about with your

nether end in a wooden bowl—then you'll be a prime bowler, don't you see ?

If a glance would slay, the mortal career of Lieutenant Thomas Puxleigh had ended there and then.

'Is the tub there, corporal ?

'Yes, sir,' replied that official, with a formal salute.

'Tell the armourer-sergeant to make an iron red-hot, as we may have to cauterise the stumps.'—'Yes, sir.'

'And as I am afraid he is a *mauvais sujet* to operate on, bring in four of the main guard to hold him fast. Now, Mr. Scrowle, are you ready ?' asked Puck, making an appalling and rasping sound with the knife and saw, while Scrowle, who, to tell the truth, was in no small agony with the splints and bandages, seemed about to faint in sheer terror.

However, the expected visit of the regimental surgeon about that time on one hand, and the trumpets sounding the 'assembly' for morning parade, on the other, put a sudden end to this protracted practical joke. Scrowle was released from his misery by the corporal ; and feeling his limbs sorely benumbed, he limped away, amid the laughter of the soldiers, and left the barracks, with rage and fury in his heart.

For some considerable time after this, he did not present himself at Barons Hall, and certainly he never again went near the cavalry barracks ; but by the time his cheque was expended, and he thought of again putting 'the screw' on Sir Jahleel, events were to transpire that were somewhat out of his calculation.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FLIGHT.

IN due time tidings came to Barons Hall of the joke to which Mr. Scrowle had been subjected, and regrets that the mishap had not been a real and fatal one were pretty general. It was also known that he was well and whole ; that he was seen from

time to time in Brighton; and would ere long resume his residence with Sir Jahleel.

Great was the consternation of Dolly on hearing all this.

Since that eventful evening when he had dared so coarsely to threaten her, a maddening and bewildering terror of Scrowle possessed her; and when Vincent Sheldon in one of his letters, sent under cover to Ricochette, set before her that a secret flight might save her from destruction, and yet not inculcate her father with their mutual tormentor (as Douglas had suggested), she began to consider the subject more fully once again, though torn two ways by conflicting emotions—duty to her father and love to her betrothed.

September was drawing on now, and the very day on which they *were* to have been married was approaching! Were ever a young couple so cruelly severed and harassed before?

It was difficult to understand, and yet she felt the horrid conviction that by all the pitying and bewildered household at Barons Hall she was regarded now as Scrowle's promised wife, and utter sickening shame was added to her disgust and dismay.

The very day on which Joab Scrowle might return was named, and the awful possibilities hanging over her father and herself began to assume tangible shapes in the girl's mind.

She shed no tears now; her heart seemed to have become benumbed and to stand still, while lip and cheek grew white with dread and anticipation. Her pale face expressed only terror, and was the face, as Violet thought at times, of one whose reason was trembling in the balance; but never before was Dolly's mind more settled and made up as to how she was to act.

Her father, she thought, had treated her hardly indeed in surrendering her to Scrowle, and seeking to rend asunder the tender ties that bound her to Vincent Sheldon, but even while this conviction grew upon her, and strengthened with its growth, she could not think without pangs of anguish and regret of the alarm and dismay her flight would cause Sir Jahleel, with vague terrors of Scrowle's vengeance; but the horror of his return,

and of what might come to pass, proved too much for her nerves, and with that thought she mentally cast a despairing glance at the future, when desolation and disgrace would come upon her, as the wife of such a man, if she failed to act *now*.

She prepared a small packet—so small indeed as to be easily carried and concealed under her cloak—containing linen, brush, comb, slippers, etc., and made up her mind as to the day and hour of her departure.

She knew the regular habits of everyone in the house, and had no fear of being detected, or even observed.

She rose early one morning, just as day was breaking, and long before any member of the household was astir; yet the object she had in view was of such an unusual kind that she could not help trembling lest Violet might awaken and intercept her, as she knelt by her bedside and prayed. Then, peeping at Violet sleeping calmly on her pillow, she would fain have kissed her beautiful sister, but dressed softly and quickly, took her little bundle, went quietly downstairs, quitted the silent house by the conservatory door, and swiftly and lightly as a fairy sped across the lawn.

She looked on the brightening sky, flushing with golden light, and throwing the shadows of the grand old trees far westward across the grass. All was still, not even a dog barked.

She pondered for a moment on her future, and that future which the present step—a very terrible one for her (even though accompanied by Vincent Sheldon)—might bring her father; but she could think of nothing but Scrowle—Joab Scrowle! Quick to decide now, when her feelings were strong, she continued her flight across the lawn, remembering that in the very walks she was now threading in hot haste, she and Vincent had often planned out their honeymoon.

She could not quit the grounds by the principal entrance without rousing the gatekeeper, but did so by a gap in a hedge, where Vincent Sheldon in a wild tumult of joy awaited her. A burst of tears relieved her agitated heart now, as she threw her-

self upon his breast, and his arm went fondly round her. Not a word was exchanged, and in a cab they drove to the railway station, in the most methodical manner, to catch an early train for London.

Dolly was not, when thus quitting her father's house, going forth to the chances of Bohemian poverty, hard work, or doubtful destiny, to loneliness and probable misery. She was joining the man who was her affianced husband, the accepted of her father and her family, and who was the favourite of his own; though she knew Vincent to be in reality only the adopted son and heir of old Mr. Sheldon.

Even the most censorious people could not but excuse her, and sympathise with her in the course she adopted.

However, the die was cast, and there was no returning now. And she thought with Othello :

‘If it were now to die,
’Twere now to die most happy,’

as she laid her head on Vincent's breast.

She had not even to think of her pocket money or reckon it over. She was with Vincent now, and he would provide for everything. She had no contingency to appal her now, not even Joab Scrowle! And as the train was speeding London-ward, past Hayward's Heath, she looked at her watch, and knew that now her flight from home would be known to all at Barons Hall.

When Violet had been some time awake she called to Dolly, but received no response. ‘Poor soul,’ she thought, ‘let her sleep while she may. Oblivion, if she can get it, is better than her waking thoughts.’ After a time she called again, with the same result, and the utter stillness, the absence even of breathing that seemed to prevail, made her start up, and in a moment she saw that the pillow of Dolly's bed had been lately pressed, but the bed itself was empty. Still Violet was not alarmed, though in the late long course of sleepless nights early rising had not been a peculiarity of Dolly's; but it was soon discovered that she was not in the house, and the summons of the bell to morning

prayers, and then to breakfast, soon produced an alarm, and led to the discovery that she was not even in the grounds, the lawn, gardens, or orchard.

'Gone; she has certainly left us,' said Sir Jahleel, in great perturbation of mind; 'but when, and with whom?'

When, it was difficult to say; but the suspicions of all pointed to an elopement, probably to France or to Scotland, with Vincent Sheldon. There were mingled emotions of fear and of relief in the minds of her sisters; fear, for her fate was yet involved in doubt, and relief that she had escaped Scrowle, who was to arrive that evening.

After all, she might *not* be with Vincent Sheldon, but have sought shelter with some of their many friends. That Dolly, however despairing, would do anything very desperate never occurred to them, and doubtless an early post or telegram would arrive to ease their minds; but the day passed on, and there came no sign or message from the pretty fugitive, and, as evening approached, the soul of Sir Jahleel became a prey to the most craven fear—dread of Scrowle's vengeance and the impending crash, the revelation of that guilt which till now had been withheld from his family and the world!

In due time, when the dinner gong was about to sound, a cab deposited Mr. Scrowle, with his portmanteau, baggy 'gamp,' and short pipe, at the *porte-cochère*, and the moment he was ushered into the room, chilling though his reception was at all times, it seemed more than usually so now, and he detected instantly that something out of the common had occurred, though he could not conceive what that something might be.

His bloodshot eyes looked sharply round, and after they had taken in with equal approval and appreciation the well-set-out dinner-table, with its snowy cloth, plate, crystal, and fruits, he said bluntly to Sir Jahleel: 'What is up, old boy—eh?'

'We are in great concern just now, Mr. Scrowle,' said his host.

'About what—or who?—Dolly?'

There was certainly no tender or lover-like cadence, or even

friendly interest, in the way he pronounced her name. He did so viciously and waspishly.

‘About Dolly—yes.’

‘You mean to say that she has tried to run away again?’ he asked, with knitted brows.

‘She has left us completely this time, I am sorry to say,’ replied Sir Jahleel, cowering under the rattlesnake eyes of Scrowle, for bitterly he felt that in permitting a creature like this to stand between him and the law he had sunk to a low level indeed.

‘Well, you must find her again, that is all, or you know what *my* course will be,’ said Scrowle, as he filled himself a glass of wine from the nearest decanter and seated himself at table. ‘I believe it is all a cheat—a lie—but I shall have my revenge!’

‘At least I hope you will avoid any discussion on this subject until we are alone, Mr. Scrowle,’ said the haughty Kate, who was white with suppressed passion that he should dare to speak thus before Tapleigh and the servants. So Scrowle, who was rather in awe of her, began to mop his hands and roll his handkerchief into a ball, as he too was swelling with anger and baffled spite, while the dinner, for which he alone had an appetite, and no small one, proceeded in oppressive silence.

When Kate and her sister rose to retire, Mr. Scrowle hastened fussily to open the door for them, as he had seen Vincent Sheldon and others do, but making them a low bow of insult and mockery. Feeling intense commiseration for their father, whose misery seemed abject, though his timidity was certainly calculated to produce some emotion of contempt in their breasts, Violet and Kate withdrew the moment they could do so, even before the dessert—to which Mr. Scrowle did also ample justice—was fairly placed upon the table; and just as the last of the servants retired, Mr. Tapleigh approached his master with a massive silver salver, whereon lay a telegram, in its unmistakable yellow envelope.

‘Any answer required?’ said Sir Jahleel.—‘No, sir.’

‘Then you may go.’

And bursting with curiosity, Tapleigh retired to the room of Mrs. Jellybag, the housekeeper, for a mutual comparison of notes and observations.

'It is from *her*, I suppose,' said Mr. Scrowle sullenly, while picking his teeth with a silver fruit fork.

'No,' replied Sir Jahleel, as he read the document with marked trepidation.

'Who then?' asked Scrowle, in his most bullying tone.

'My old friend, Mr. Vincent Sheldon, senior, in whose house, I find, my daughter has taken refuge.'

'From whom?'—'Can you ask?—from you.'

'Ah! This begins to look like business at last,' exclaimed Scrowle, his face radiant with the intensity of malevolence; 'we'll have to start at once, and fetch her back; by Jove, I'll do so, if I drag her by the hair of her head.'

'We are too late to catch any train that would deposit us in London before midnight,' said Sir Jahleel; 'and at that hour I could not present myself at Mr. Sheldon's without causing speculation in his household.'

'His household be blowed!' roared Scrowle, applying himself to the cut decanters in the silver liqueur frame, and filling a champagne-glass from the contents thereof.

'Moreover, Mr. Scrowle, on this mission I shall start by an early train to-morrow, and I shall go alone.'

'You shan't go without me, that is flat,' exclaimed Scrowle, with an imprecation.

'To-morrow morning you will think better of it, when you are less excited,' urged Sir Jahleel, seeking to temporise with his tormentor.

'If you go without me it will be the worse for you, and neither you nor old Sheldon shall diddle me. If you attempt it I will drive straight to the nearest magistrate, and interest him in your little story, by Jingo! Yes, I will, by the living Jingo!'

And with this threat Scrowle took the brandy decanter from the liqueur-frame, and departed to the smoking-room, leaving

Sir Jahleel with a hope he would 'enjoy that rot he called claret,' for it was thus he stigmatised Mr. Tapleigh's prime Lafite and Château Margau.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'A MINGLED YARN.'

SIR JAHLEEL, accompanied by Scrowle, took an early train for London, intent apparently on recapturing the runaway. The whole day passed without any tidings of them coming from Mr. Sheldon's house, from Douglas, or from Gresham Street; and Kate and Violet, each a prey to the keenest anxiety, knew not what to think.

They were ignorant of what was transpiring—whether their unfortunate father had baffled their common tormentor, or whether the latter had put his vague threats of vengeance into some tangible form. They only knew that under Mr. Sheldon's roof their darling Dolly was safer than she would be now at Barons Hall; and if driven by Scrowle's wiles, presence, or menaces from the former, there was no knowing whither blank and sheer desperation might drive her. But when the following day began to pass, and still there were no signs, their anxiety increased. Had Scrowle proved victorious? But that was too dreadful to think of. Sir Harry Honeywood had of late made Dolly's illness an excuse for several visits to Barons Hall. He was ever at hand now, in attendance on the sisters as before, and for Violet he fetched and carried, as Tom Tandem said—rode into Brighton for a new novel, for music, to match even a skein of silk; nothing was too trivial as an errand for the long-legged, tawny-moustached hussar; and so far as Violet was concerned, Kate thought matters were looking exceedingly hopeful.

Sir Harry had not, however, come to the point again. He was, nevertheless, one who did not like to be balked in anything—a game of billiards, a row, steeplechase, a bet, or aught else, so why in the matter of Violet Jermyn? He thought of

the banter of Tom Tandem, of Bramley, and even of little Puck, and did not like to be baffled, or fail 'in landing his big fish,' as one of the trio had said.

'I have a dozen minds to volunteer for Afghanistan,' said he to them, over their laced aerated water, one evening.

'If this girl won't have you?' asked Tandem.—'Yes.'

'Afghanistan—when our sapient Ministry have handed it over to the Russians—the Ameer, or some one else.'

'Well—to the Cape then; there is always a row on there,' continued Sir Harry, who in his cups was full of sentimentality, and somewhat oblivious of his little friend with the frizzled golden hair, with her tiny brougham and everlasting sealskin jacket.

'Stay at home—bide your time, and don't be a goose,' was the comment of Tom Tandem.

So the next day saw Sir Harry at Barons Hall, intent on putting his fate once more unto the test. He was received by Kate and Violet in the drawing-room, and from the expression of his face—usually a vacant one—the latter had some intuition of his errand. The usual common-places ensued—Miss Dolly was well, and Sir Jahleel was in town. They all thought of Scrowle, but none spoke of *him*; and aware how obnoxious he was to the sisters, Sir Harry made neither explanation nor apology with reference to the rough trick played upon him at the barracks—a practical joke, which in the case of any other guest of the family, would have been, of course, unwarrantable.

'Seen Douglas lately?' asked Sir Harry as a pause ensued, and a hectic blush crossed Violet's face at the time.

'We do not have him here, as we used to have him in town,' said Kate, annoyed to perceive that even the name could stir her sister; 'and papa, I believe, is about to dismiss him.'

'The deuce he is! I don't think he can know very well what he is about in that instance,' was the enigmatical reply of their visitor; then he asked, 'What has Mr. Douglas done or omitted to do?'

'I don't know; it does not concern us, as you may well sup-

pose,' replied Kate, with her brightest smile, who, on seeing the face of Ricochette at the door, retired hurriedly, saying, 'Excuse me, as I am wanted, but Violet will entertain you, Sir Harry.'

Now Violet had studiously and carefully avoided being left alone with Honeywood, as she dreaded a repetition of the last forenoon they had been together. She knew that Kate's absence was deliberate and would be a prolonged one, and her colour rose, while her heart beat quickly, and Kate, by what had passed about Douglas, had raised some very mingled emotions in her heart.

With the ocular proof she had of Douglas's want of faith—that her love had been trifled with—her pride was roused, and the renewal of Sir Harry's attention was flattering and eminently calculated to be fatal to the interests of her Scottish lover.

She wished to thrust the false image out of her heart, to leave no space for tender memories; but the memories haunted her, and the image seemed to hover by her side or hang over her still.

'But what is Douglas to me,' she reflected, 'that I should hesitate about accepting the honourable and open addresses of another of higher and undoubted position and wealth? My foolish dream of love—his love, like faith in his fidelity—is gone for ever! Why should I meekly and meanly mourn for one who is lost to me for ever, and never can be mine?'

Reflections such as these were favourable indeed to the prospects of Sir Harry, and equally damaging to the future prospects of Douglas, though Violet might never learn—which seemed very probable—the mistake she had made, and the deliberate perfidy of Kate. Yet, of course, chances there were that she might discover all when it was too late.

Even while the thoughts described were passing through her mind, Sir Harry—who had been thinking how handsome she looked with her rich brown hair dressed to perfection, her pure complexion contrasting vividly with the deep blue ribbon that banded the soft lace round her delicate neck, a single diamond sparkling in each of her tiny ears, her sweet smiling mouth, the

red and slightly parted lips showing the white teeth below—Sir Harry, we say, had taken possession of her right hand caressingly between his own two, and bending near her down-cast face, said: ‘Violet, may I speak to you again on the subject we spoke of when last we were together alone—my pure and tender love for you, the love of my life?’

Violet trembled, for her heart was just then torn by unexplainable doubts and fears.

‘You refer, I am sure, Sir Harry, to that to which I would rather not recur,’ she replied.

‘Pardon me, Violet—the one aim of my life now is to spend it with you.’

‘I am indeed most grateful to you.’

‘Violet—my dearest Violet—can you give me only gratitude?’ he whispered, with sorrow and ardour in his tone and manner; but she remained silent, though without withdrawing her hand. It was impossible for poor Violet to forget that, even while she was listening to Sir Harry, the dark disgrace her father so keenly dreaded might have fallen on his old head, and through him on them all; and that the fashionable hussar, who was now laying his love, title, and fortune at her feet to-day, might shrink from her and her sisters on the morrow!

Then came the ever-recurring question, *what* could that secret be? How often had she watched her father’s face, recently so careworn, and seen in it the expression that darkens like a cloud passing over a field, and heard him sigh when he pretended to smile.

‘Speak, Violet,’ urged Sir Harry, pressing her soft little hand; ‘have you still only gratitude to give me?’

‘Just now I cannot give you more.’—‘Why?’

‘I—I—am fettered—I cannot explain—papa——’

‘Fettered! Are you not free?’

‘There is another and conflicting or controlling influence, to which I dare not refer,’ said Violet, in a voice full of emotion, which her hearer failed to understand.

'Another?' he repeated.

She was voiceless, and the baronet's fair face darkened a little while he played with his long tawny moustache, and, truth to tell, at that moment she was thinking more perhaps of her father's fatal secret than of the false lover who had trifled with her.

'There *is* some other then?' said he, relinquishing her hand, yet thinking what a slim and shapely one it was.

'I have not said so, and you must not assume that there is. Believe me, there is none—*now*,' she added in her heart.

'Then may I not hope, dearest Violet?' he asked, taking her hand again.

'I cannot even bid you hope, Sir Harry.'

The love he bore her—a love born of admiration for her great beauty—was not of that passionate kind which failure would transform into hate, or success into transport; yet his heart did beat slightly when she felt it necessary to add:

'I cannot bid you hope, Sir Harry—yet awhile.'

'In time, then, Violet?'

'In time, perhaps,' she replied, now looking him gently and entreatingly in the face, and using his words as if fearful of trusting to her own.

'In time I might really come to love him,' she thought, 'if I had never loved Douglas. But what is Douglas to me?' was her next bitter idea.

But this style of intercourse with Sir Harry could not go on; she knew that it must either take some tangible form or cease altogether. He was no longer—after the words that had been spoken—the privileged dangler he had been in London—the useful friend—the adopted brother. He was an avowed lover—one who had formally proposed twice; and all this flashed through Violet's mind as she sat with the point of his moustache within an inch of her ear, and her passive hand in his, listening to his protestations of regards—and rather broken and incoherent protestations they were.

She sighed with real pleasure when she thought of Sir Harry's

honourable love as regarded herself; of men's private lives and little peccadilloes she knew nothing. She deemed him all goodness and generosity—and generous and good he certainly was, as men of the world go; and now, sighing with a certain responsive tenderness towards him, she almost wished that she had never known Sholto Douglas, and then she would freely have rewarded the devotion of Sir Harry Honeywood; but now there was a weightier matter still. What was transpiring in London?

'Dearest Violet, I have your good father's kindest and fullest sanction for addressing you as I do,' said he.

'I know you have, Sir Harry.'

'Do cut off the *Sir*! He wishes me success with all his heart.'

'Wait till he returns.'

'And when does he return?'

'To-morrow—to-night, perhaps, I hope, I shall give you a final answer,' she replied, growing most charmingly pale and red alternately; 'dear, dear Sir Harry, excuse me till then.'

'Till then,' said he, kissing her hand, and then her cheek, before she was aware of his intention, and the highest hopes grew strong in his heart; but he knew not 'how much longer a woman grieves for the love she has *lost* untimely, than for the love she has *won* and worn out like a threadbare garment--till the vanishing of the silken woof reveals the worn thread of the warp.'

So to this stage or crisis had matters come between Violet and her lover. The return of Sir Jahleel would decide all, and he did not doubt that the decision would be favourable for them all. *But* Sir Jahleel did not return within the expected time, though ample intelligence soon came to Barons Hall of his movements in London, where he was detained by business—business of a very unexpected nature indeed.

From the windows of the drawing-room Violet, excited certainly by the recent interview, and feeling his kisses still on

twelve bridesmaids in white vicuna (whatever that may mean), with petticoats of red and white striped satin, who strewed the way with flowers before the bride and bridegroom as they left the church. Ah, we'll dispense with that, though I suppose the Rev. Octave Paschal Bede would rather like it. What is this? Strange event at—Rotterdam, by Jingo!

And so on, Scrowle continued mockingly and fearlessly, as he had a perfect confidence in his power to worry Sir Jahleel, and terrify him into perfect subjection and helplessness. He had fully resolved to make a fine fortune out of him yet. Had Mr. Scrowle looked a little further over the *Times* he might have seen a paragraph that would rather have startled him!

'To think,' he began in a low voice, as a new mood of mockery seized him, 'to think of that pretty dear running away all alone by its little self to London and never leaving me even its photograph! How happy it will be to see its own Joab again! Oh crickey! what a lark—what a lark! It makes me thirsty—dry as a limekiln—to think about it.'

'Bantering villain!' thought Sir Jahleel; 'will my day for vengeance and retribution ever come?'

But he felt doubtful if such could ever be, and in his face there was an expression of hopelessness that would have excited the pity of any one but Scrowle.

'Have you no consideration—no human feeling—no pity, Scrowle?' he asked, as they were about to take a cab from Victoria Station to Mr. Sheldon's house.

'Don't think to get over me with your high-falutin',' said the other, with a finger by the side of his red nose; 'I have consideration; but you have the hush-money. Let us have another b. and s.; it will keep up your pecker, old fellow; and let us once be at Sheldon's, and we'll soon see who is master of the situation.'

He buried his nose in the frothing rummer, and his eyes glistened with mingled triumph, malice, envy, and pleasure.

'Hah!' he thought, grinding his teeth as they drove off; 'I have got him tighter now than ever, though the girl has run

away. Face to face with old Sheldon, eh, who often cold-shouldered me! I've made old Jahleel shell out pretty freely in times past, and I'll make him shell out more handsomely now than ever, or send him to pick oakum and work the crank!' The latter threat he uttered aloud, adding, 'I'll punish our Dolly for this little game, and I may crush young Sheldon, too, if he interferes.'

'Her regard for him we must deem a girl's fleeting fancy,' said the wretched Sir Jahleel, seeking to temporise.

'Just wait till I am face to face with her!'

'You will be merciful, Scrowle?'

'To whom—you or her?'

'To both—to her more than all.'

'Does she deserve it, after all the trouble she has given us? And now we shall have old Sheldon standing in the gap. But he had better beware; he doesn't know Joab Scrowle!'

Under the influence of his various brandies-and-sodas, the latter had become more than ever confident, noisy, abusive, and courageous; he drew up his shirt collar, stuck his hat over his eyes, grasped his baggy umbrella, and frowned with grotesque portentousness. At last the cab—which Sir Jahleel paid for—deposited them at the portico of Mr. Sheldon's house at the corner of Harley Street, and they were ushered in, the heart of the former beating wildly and painfully at every step, his spirit sinking lower and his temples throbbing.

'How well does the Londoner know such a monotonous street as Harley Street,' says a graphic writer. 'There were the two rows of monotonous houses staring each other out of countenance, the whitened doorsteps, the shining brass plates on professional doors, the balcony boxes with their scarlet geraniums and fading mignonette, the plate-glass windows and invariable draperies—crimson damask below and white muslin above—here a birdcage, there a man or maid-servant looking out.' Both Sir Jahleel and his Frankenstein knew well such a thoroughfare in all its features and details.

They found themselves in a spacious and stately, yet prim, old-fashioned drawing-room, the massive furniture of which was probably not new when old Mr. Sheldon was a boy, as the mantelpiece French clock seemed to date from the time of the First Napoleon ; the bronze candelabras, with long tiers of cut crystal pendants, were of the same epoch ; there were two old bureaux that looked like chests of drawers. On the yellow marble mantelpiece was a large gilt mirror furnished with sconces, corresponding with a circular mirror at the other end, over which projected a golden eagle with a green glass ball hanging from its beak, and in the recess of each window was a curious old cabinet of carved ebony, inlaid with silver.

There were attenuated console tables, rich old carpet and hangings ; and though everything was elegant and tasteful, comfortable, but old-fashioned, to the eye of Scrowle, accustomed lately to the garish splendour of Barons Hall, all seemed meagre and faded, and with this conviction his confidence and disposition to insolence waxed apace. He placed his hat on the floor, crossed his hands on the handle of his umbrella, planted his chin upon them, and took a somewhat disparaging view of his surroundings, but started to his feet when Mr. Sheldon entered the room accompanied by Vincent, who carefully closed the door. The former, a benevolent-looking old gentleman, with generally mild expression of face, white hair, clear, honest blue eyes, a good-humoured mouth, and bright healthy complexion, received Sir Jahleel somewhat coolly, and completely ignored Scrowle. He was carefully dressed, as City men invariably are, and had his rotund person encased in a well-fitting black surtout.

‘Good morning, Sir Jahleel,’ said he, but without presenting his hand ; ‘be seated. I hope you left the young ladies well ? You got my telegram, of course ?’

‘And we came here in consequence,’ said Scrowle.

‘*We* ? I did not address you, sir.’

‘Yes, we,’ said Scrowle sullenly and defiantly.

'You are Mr. Joab Scrowle, I believe?'—'At your service.'

'What do you want in my house?'

'That you'll soon find out,' said Scrowle, undeterred by the aspect of Vincent, who looked decidedly hostile, with eyes flashing fire, and his hands clenched. 'We have come to get Miss Dolly Jermyn—the girl you have concealed here, and whom the law will compel you to produce, sir.'

'The young lady will be nineteen on her next birthday, and thus is completely her own mistress—able to defy the law and everyone,' said Mr. Sheldon; 'but, Sir Jahleel, in reference to your daughter, do you authorise this person, who has intruded himself here, to speak thus, and adopt this remarkable tone?'

Sir Jahleel groaned, but remained silent.

'The young lady you inquire for, and whom you have had the unparalleled audacity to follow, is now beyond her father's control,' said Vincent emphatically.

'Indeed! How?'

'She is now my wife,' was the triumphant reply.

'It is a lie!' roared Scrowle, grasping his big umbrella.

'One word more in that tone and character, and by heaven I'll strangle you,' said Vincent.

'Married!' said Sir Jahleel faintly, turning to Mr. Sheldon.

'Fact, my dear sir,' replied the latter, smiling blandly. 'In my presence and before the registrar, the young folks were married yesterday, as you may see in this morning's *Times*, and under all the atrocious circumstances of the case I think they did quite right.'

Old Mr. Sheldon folded his arms and looked round him with a victorious smile. Sir Jahleel seemed perplexed and terrified for the future turn his affairs might take. Scrowle looked baffled, but furious with rage, not that personally he cared in the least for Dolly, or was capable of doing so, as to him she had only been the means to a lucrative end; and now she was beyond his reach!

'Here is this morning's *Times*,' said Mr. Sheldon. At first

neither of his visitors took the paper. At last Sir Jahleel did so with trembling hands, and read the undoubtable announcement among the marriages, while Mr. Sheldon eyed him with an expression in his old face of amusement, curiously mingled with no small contempt. Scrowle's face was a picture !

Dolly married, was gone—gone from his felon grasp, and with her went every penny of the hundred thousand pounds for which this daring schemer had been playing.

The bone was taken from the tiger, but the tiger yet was there.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ROTTERDAM MYSTERY.

'I'LL be revenged for this !' said Scrowle, starting to his feet and glaring at Sir Jahleel ; 'and though you may have had no share in this trick—as now I don't think you had—I am not done with you yet.'

'What *do* you mean, Scrowle ?' asked Sir Jahleel piteously, and yet with surprise. 'What can I do now ?'

'Simply this. You have two other daughters, equally well weighted with the ready, and though we shall have all the worry and opposition to go over and get over again, by ——' (here he swore a dreadful oath) 'one of them I shall have for my wife—I don't care which—or you know what the result will be.'

At this strange announcement, made in such a manner and by such a man, both Mr. Sheldon and Vincent started to their feet, and made threateningly a forward stride.

Sir Jahleel's lean and wrinkled hands opened and shut convulsively ; the veins in his forehead swelled ; his teeth chattered ; he gasped rather than breathed ; an expression like that of a sudden access of insanity glared in his eyes ; and he seemed on the point of springing on his tormentor and destroying him on the spot, and might have done so, for, old as he was, passion just then endued him with a strength far beyond his own ; but Mr. Sheldon threw himself between them,

'Vincent,' he said, 'lock that door, and prevent this person's escape.'

Scrowle saw the locking of the door, but he only smiled triumphantly and maliciously, as he said,

'You have two other girls, old Jahleel, and one of them I'll have, and her tin too, OR—you know the rest.'

Sir Jahleel's arms fell powerless by his side.

'Sir Jahleel,' said Mr. Sheldon firmly, and with considerable gravity of manner, 'under the influence and at the behest of this mysterious man Scrowle, you cruelly broke off the marriage of your youngest daughter with my heir, Vincent, forbidding him your house, to the astonishment and no small dismay of all our mutual friends. You brought that hideous reptile into your household as a member of your family. He controls all your plans and movements, while his language, threats, and avowed intentions are so outrageous that, if not mad, he ought to be in the hands of the police. Now, I call upon you in the name of justice to your family, and in the memory of our long and only recently interrupted friendship, to explain yourself, and say what power has this man over you ?'

'He is an impostor—a scoundrel, whom a court of justice ——,' began Sir Jahleel, and then paused.

'Ho ! who has most to fear in a court of justice—you or I ?' said Scrowle, with a grin, while mopping his damp hands with his handkerchief, and rolling it up into a ball.

'Explain—explain all this,' said Mr. Sheldon, 'or by heaven I'll have a constable here in five minutes. Jermyn, you are the victim of a conspiracy.'

'I have often thought so,' groaned Sir Jahleel, not knowing what to say in the extremity of his peril, shame, and misery.

'Keep the key of that door, Vincent, nor let it be opened but to give this man into custody,' said Mr. Sheldon. 'I am in the commission of the peace, and can myself commit him, if Sir Jahleel will not.'

'Before you take up the pen to write out the warrant perhaps

you had better hear my story,' said Scrowle, who now felt that matters had come to a crash at last. 'I suppose you knew old Mr. Selby, of Selby and Jermyn?'

'By name only,' replied Mr. Sheldon. 'He was dead before I was in the City—well?'

'He left a son, Piercy—heir to all his fortune—that is, to his share in the business in Gresham Street—and he had no other relative in the world; and by his will, if that child died before attaining to maturity, then, and in that case, everything went to his junior partner, Mr. Jermyn.'

'Well?' said Mr. Sheldon impatiently, yet with growing interest.

'The child disappeared when in his fifth or sixth year.'

'Disappeared! How?'

'Some said he was drowned, though the body never could be got,' said Scrowle, pausing, with his eyes fixed in a kind of glare on Sir Jahleel's face.

'Proceed, sir!' exclaimed Mr. Sheldon.

Though he took care not to say a word about the forged bill, or the means he took to recover and destroy that document, Scrowle related all that the reader knows about the abduction of Piercy Selby and Sir Jahleel's accession to the child's patrimony, in right of the will—a narrative to which Mr. Sheldon listened with wonder and contempt.

'And I can produce the lost heir,' he added, in conclusion, 'to demand the fortune that must—in the hands of Sir Jahleel—have been so matured and improved in the course of twenty years.'

'Is this son of Mr. Selby's aware of his own identity and inheritance?'

'No. Do you think he would be so precious green as to lie low if he did?'

'Then you alone can enlighten him, prove the circumstances, and produce the links of evidence?'

'I alone.'

'Where is this child?'

'The man that was the child can soon be found,' replied

Scrowle, who began to think that the ground was slipping from under his feet after all, while Sir Jahleel's fears and suspicions reverted again to Douglas, and while all the details of this—to him—degrading story were in progress, he lay with his arms stretched out on the table, his face hidden upon them, and groaning deeply in agony, misery, and shame—on which Scrowle's eyes feasted, and in which his soul revelled.

'Where is Piercy Selby?' demanded Mr. Sheldon.

'That is my business,' said Scrowle; 'and now unlock that door, I say; if you are in the commission of the peace, as you say you are, and won't make out a warrant for old Jahleel's arrest, I, turning Queen's evidence against him for abduction and robbery (ugly words, ain't they?)—I'll find another beak that will do so!'

In fact, just then, Scrowle was only anxious to get away, for the purpose of maturing some other designs against Sir Jahleel, which had just begun to occur to him as more than ever necessary to his nefarious purposes.

'Stay—a word or two more with you, Joab Scrowle,' said Mr. Sheldon, into whose face a peculiar brightness and eagerness of expression suddenly came. 'In what part of Rotterdam was it you abandoned the child to its fate? Was it in the public walk known as the *Plantage*?'

'Yes.'

'Just outside the Gouda Gate?'

'Yes,' replied Scrowle, beginning to look surprised and alarmed.

'On the night of the 16th October, 18—?'

'Yes—exactly so; but how do *you* come to know all that?'

'My God! how strange! I was then in Rotterdam on business, and passing homeward that way to my hotel—the *Hôtel des Pays Bas*, on the *Quai*, near the steamers, when I found a child crying bitterly—a homeless and helpless child, English, as I soon discovered, lost or abandoned by those who could never be found, and who never claimed it, though advertised for in the Dutch and London papers. I brought the foundling home,

adopted him, and learned to love him, for I was a childless and lonely man—I adopted him, gave him my name, and there he stands before you—Vincent Sheldon !

He put his arm, as he said this, caressingly round Vincent, who had always been aware that he was neither the son nor the nephew of this father by adoption ; and it was his infantile recollections of Rotterdam to which he had referred, when told by Douglas how strangely perturbed Sir Jahleel always became, at any reference made by Scrowle to that busy city by the Maese.

All the occurrences there had happened so long ago that Mr. Sheldon had almost forgotten the fact that the child thus thrown upon his hands was *not* his own son, for as such he had ever regarded him, but now, that he should prove to be the only son of Selby, the dead partner of Sir Jahleel, and heir to half the other's fortune, was a startling event.

'A likely story,' said Scrowle, who saw by this the demolition of a scheme he had just begun to form ; 'a likely story, of which we must have further proof.'

'To your own detriment, scoundrel. What other proof can *you* want? The published advertisements, my commonplace books and correspondence prove my part of the story : to prove yours would not be much to your advantage.'

'Piercy Selby had a peculiar flesh-mark, as Sir Jahleel well knows.'

'Exactly,' replied Mr. Sheldon ; 'scarlet flesh-mark between his shoulders, and he has it still. His linen, his socks, and all his little garments, which I carefully preserved, are marked "P.S.," another proof of his identity with the child you stole and abandoned, and whom you are, I know, utterly unable to produce or foist upon us. And now, Joab Scrowle, quit my house, and at once, or I shall have you kicked out, or thrown out of a window !'

Maddened by rage and long suffering, Sir Jahleel, old as he was, was about to rush at Scrowle, and endued even once more with a new and strange strength, he might have pommelled him

effectively; but he was anticipated by Vincent—or must we call him Piercy Selby now?—who seized him by the nape of the neck, or coat-collar, dragged him downstairs, and fairly kicked him—hat, umbrella, and all—into the street, where he fell, a helpless and breathless heap, into the gutter. ‘That satisfaction,’ we are told, ‘which unregenerate man derives from having given free indulgence to his evil passions, having poured the strong wine of vengeance into a cup and the draught to the lees, is not a lasting content. The fiery flavour is pleasant enough for the moment, but the strength of the drink evaporates in the chilling atmosphere of reason.’

So it was with revengeful, spiteful, and avaricious Joab Scrowle, on whom the tables were completely turned!

Ignorant of the existence of Selby’s son, he had often thought in times past of schooling some young rascal to aid his plans by acting the part of the lost heir, and of plundering Sir Jahleel; that chance he had lost by his more ambitious designs upon Dolly’s fortune; and now, by an altogether unexpected discovery, it was gone—gone for ever—and with it the power to extort and torment! Inspired by rage and spite, baffled avarice and hate, his back and other parts of his person aching sorely under the recent manipulation of Dolly’s husband, his shaggy eyebrows contracted, his rattlesnake eyes blazed and became more blood-shot with infernal yet impotent fury, his hard, cruel mouth was drawn down at the corner, and altogether Joab Scrowle, ‘Esquire,’ as he had been calling himself of late, was not just then a pleasant person to look upon as he took his departure from the vicinity of Harley Street.

He had of late been accustomed to much unwonted luxury. He had spent nearly the last shilling of his cheque at Brighton, and was now at low water indeed. So he went, with such appetite as he had, to lunch—not on *soles au maître d’hôtel* and partridges daintily roasted on toast, with the choice wines of Mr. Tapleigh’s cellar—but on a frugal fried sausage of doubtful material, and a pint of beer in a dingy public-house in a narrow

lane off Oxford Street—beer which he drank with a face suggestive of there being an infusion of henbane in it.

There had been times with Mr. Scrowle when his little world, if aught was askew therein, often looked straighter and brighter, too, after a stiff glass of gin and water; but potations failed to do either now, and he could but grind his yellow teeth as he thought of the turn his affairs had taken. And thenceforth he may, perhaps, pass out of our *dramatis personæ*, not being a pleasant person to meet again.

Vincent Sheldon—for by that name now he preferred to be publicly known—for Dolly said that she could never bear to think of him as Piercy Selby—always knew that there was some mystery hanging over his parentage, but into which he, an easy-going fellow, never cared to inquire, and now it was all a settled thing. So Dolly was safe, and the wife of Vincent! What a load was removed from the mind of Sir Jahleel, who felt that it was even better to shrink under the steady, honest, and inquiring eyes of old Vincent Sheldon, than to shiver, cower, and quail under the hideous orbs of Joab Scrowle.

‘And this was the error you committed, papa, and so placed yourself in the power of that bad man?’ said Dolly, as she seated herself on his knee and caressed him fondly, in her pretty childish way, kissing him again and again, too deeply agitated to say much.

‘Error, Dolly? It was a crime,’ said Sir Jahleel, in a low voice; ‘a crime for which I have paid a bitter and protracted penalty. Thank God, it is all a thing of the past now, and I can make atonement to the fullest extent; but conscience will never sleep, I fear.’

‘How odd that his name should be Piercy Selby,’ said Dolly, thinking of her husband—the husband of yesterday.

‘But Vincent Sheldon he can remain to you and to the world. The secret of my terrible mistake in life must not be known.’

And gladly did Sir Jahleel, without loss of time, make to his new son-in-law that monetary reparation which was his due.

It is only some fifty miles distance from London to Brighton,

but never did that number of miles seem so long to Dolly and her father in their longing to be back at Barons Hall, and tell Kate and Violet of all that had transpired. Eager they were—she especially—beyond all measure of eagerness.

Thenceforward the name and subject of Joab Scrowle were utterly ignored, though not forgotten—for that could scarcely be.

Sir Jahleel was astonished by the sudden elasticity of his mind, consequent to the relief from the late incubus—that horrible ‘Frankenstein,’ and all he had brought upon himself; but in his desire for fullest vengeance upon Fate he was not the less resolved to get rid of his secretary, Douglas, whom for a time he had associated with the idea of Scrowle, and whose presence in his family had marred their wishes as to Violet.

Old Mr. Sheldon—a bachelor by conviction, as people said—was intensely devoted to Dolly; all the more so that she was now the wife of his favourite—his adopted son, Vincent. That Mr. Sheldon might have married long ago everyone knew, for he was always rich enough to maintain a handsome establishment and keep a wife, but he was always frank enough to give the reason for never marrying.

‘Why was it?’ asked Dolly.

‘For the simplest reason, my dear; the only woman I ever cared to marry refused me; and I never asked another after that.’

The marriage of Dolly and Vincent Sheldon before a registrar (though privately supplemented by a more solemn ceremonial by the Rev. Octave Bede) excited some commotion among the friends of the family, and caused much surmising as to the why and the wherefore there was no feast, there were no revels, there were no wedding presents for people to stare at, appraise, and talk about; but when on their Continental tour, ‘the world forgetting,’ if not ‘by the world forgot,’ all this was of little moment to the happy pair, though most interested in the matter.

‘Sir Harry proposed again for Violet, papa,’ said Kate,

‘When?’ he asked eagerly.

‘After you went to town with——’

'And she accepted him?' he asked sharply, to interrupt the odious noun.

'No, papa.'

'No!' he repeated, with knitted brow.

'I cannot tell—she wished to wait a little—to wait your return home.'

'Does Douglas influence her still?'

'I think not now.'

'What, then?'

'I cannot say. But now, dear papa, that your—our troubles are over, surely you will prosecute the peerage case with vigour.'

'Yes, Kate; all seems clear enough; a little money will make the matter smooth—it is only a Herald's College affair, I suppose.'

'And you will be Lord Torthorwald, dear, dear papa!' exclaimed Kate, clapping her white hands in a manner that reminded him of his absent Dolly.

The fatal bubble burst—Scrowle removed, and with him all chances of shame and exposure, Violet could have no reason for declining the second proposal of Sir Harry Honeywood, when he came to remind her of her promise, as no doubt he would; but several days passed on without his appearance at Barons Hall, to the considerable surprise of Kate and no small relief of Violet. But he wrote the latter, stating that the illness of a near relation detained him somewhere in the Midland counties, and that very soon he would come in person to remind her of her promise. Meanwhile, however, various matters occurred that were not very favourable to the progress of his suit.

CHAPTER XXXV.

INTO THE WORLD AGAIN.

BUSINESS matters connected with the recent marriage of Dolly and the prospective title drew Sir Jahleel again to London, and

on this occasion he resolved to gratify Kate to the full by dismissing Douglas as a punishment for his presumption with regard to Violet.

As the train bore him townwards, though he could not forget the horror of his last journey thither with Joab Scrowle, he contrived to lash himself into a terrible gust of indignation at Douglas. The calmness and dignity, the perfectly aristocratic vein of the latter's bearing, seemed to him only impudence and vanity, for what right had he, a penniless dependent, to comport himself thus? His perfect coolness and suavity of demeanour seemed cunning; his skill in music and his playing and singing but a part of those arts and contrivances with which he, a fortune-hunter and adventurer, dealing on the strength of an undoubtedly handsome person, had befooled the silly Violet, whose prospects he had so nearly ruined; and every way he viewed his luckless secretary through the medium of an angry heart and a jaundiced eye.

'I'll let him know what is what, and who is who now!' was his vague threat, as he took a hansom to Belgravia.

Sir Jahleel's hopes with regard to Violet, hopes which he ever supposed to be on the point of fruition, had latterly been a failure, frustrated by the unwelcome presence of this cunning Scotsman, for such he deemed him, this *protégé* of Mr. Charters, in his house, to which he should never have introduced him, but allowed him to vegetate in such lodgings as his meagre salary permitted. Douglas was not in his business room, as usual, when Sir Jahleel arrived, consequently he could not give vent to his wrath at once. The day was a lowering and gloomy one, and not calculated to raise the spirits.

He found a number of envelopes lying about, addressed to 'Sholto Douglas, Esq.,' in the handwriting of Mr. Charters, and all of which had been sealed with wax, an unusual act of courtesy or care in these days. The post-marks were of recent date; one, indeed, but a couple of days ago.

'What can they have been corresponding about?' thought

Sir Jahleel, curiosity adding a fresh spur to his annoyance. 'Oh, my peerage case, of course !'

At that moment Douglas entered. Sir Jahleel bowed to him stiffly, and failed to see his offered hand.

'A dull, gloomy day, Sir Jahleel,' said the secretary.

'Yes, one of your confounded Scotch mists coming on, Mr. Douglas.'

'What brings it here ? If wise it would stay at home,' said Douglas, a little surprised by his employer's tone and manner.

'I wish it would.'

'But last night there was another phenomenon, a London fog in Paris,' said Douglas, proceeding to open his desk.

'Any letters ?'—'None this morning.'

'Strange ! Have you had any from Mr. Charters lately ?'

'Yes.'

'About my business ?'—'No, Sir Jahleel.'

'Whose then ?'—'My own.'

'I am sorry,' said Sir Jahleel stiffly and sternly ; 'sorry to displease our good friend Mr. John Charters, but I have come to the conclusion of dispensing with your services, Mr. Douglas, as your conduct has much displeased me.'

'My conduct !' replied Douglas, in a calm and totally indifferent tone ; 'in what have I displeased you, Sir Jahleel—how done wrong ?'

'Done wrong !' repeated Sir Jahleel, doing his best to work himself into a state of wrath and indignation, yet only venturing to look at Douglas furtively ; 'have you not, sir, as a man dependent on my bounty——'

'Pardon me, I work for my salary.'

'Well, as an employé of mine, an inmate, a trusted inmate of my house, you have sought to entrap—nay, I believe, have entrapped—the affections of an inexperienced young girl ; you have inveigled her into compromising herself and her family by a secret correspondence, by solitary meetings, by——'

'Stay, Sir Jahleel,' exclaimed Douglas, with a wave of his hand, 'I did love your daughter, and thought she loved me ; but that is all over now, and I beg that you will recur to the matter no more. I am poor, certainly ; but better born than either you or she.'

'Of course,' interrupted Sir Jahleel, in a sneering tone ; 'every Scotsman has a pedigree, though he may not have a shoe to his foot. But quit my service and my roof this instant ! Was there ever on earth such effrontery as this ?'

In the dark and penetrating eyes of Douglas might be read much of calm pride, mortification, and sorrow at that moment ; the insult to himself produced the first emotion, the thought of Violet the last. Rid of Scrowle, strong in his position once again, Sir Jahleel was quite ready to resume to the fullest extent his purse-proud bearing, and the bullying tone that was wont to make little Penfold, Quills, and his other dependents in Gresham Street, tremble in their boots. Hence Douglas's bearing increased his exasperation, by neither explaining, apologising, nor attempting to deprecate his wrath.

'I repeat, Mr. Douglas, that I have been made fully cognisant of the part you have presumed to play in my family, by seeking to lure my daughter into an alliance with yourself—an adventurer, a fortune-hunter, a *chevalier d'industrie*, for all I know.'

'Silence !' thundered Douglas, and the knit in his dark brow grew deep and terrible, while his eyes sparkled dangerously.

'Well, at all events, what position could you have given her?' continued Sir Jahleel, moderating his tone a little. 'What would you have lived upon? Her money? Not a penny of mine should she have had. But she saw her folly and—no thanks to you—repented of it in time.'

As these bitter words were uttered Douglas thought of the returned ring, and they added bitterness to the memory ; but he merely replied, while adjusting some dockets of paper with the air of one who was doing so for the last time, 'Sir Jahleel, you forget yourself—you forget yourself and me !'

'You—you, to whom I pay a salary as I do my clerks—a wage, as I do my butler and cook !'

Douglas's manner was derisive and scornful ; and now he regarded Sir Jahleel with one of those quiet smiles that exasperated the latter, and then proceeded to collect a few books and trifles that belonged to himself.

'With my wealth,' began Sir Jahleel, rattling the handfuls of gold and silver in his pocket, 'with my means, sir——'

'A man may have both without worth, honour, or even respectability,' interrupted Douglas.

'What the devil do you mean?' asked Sir Jahleel, wincing as he thought of Joab Scrowle.

'I claim to have a truer right to know the relative position of those in society than you, sir—a mushroom of the City !'

'I do not pretend to be able to penetrate into the records of *your* genealogy, Mr. Douglas,' replied Sir Jahleel, in a tone which meant to be intensely sarcastic and scathing, 'nor to ask the lofty descent which you deem perhaps entitles you to adopt this tone to me—I, who may yet sit in the House of Lords. But—but——'

'I beg your pardon. I forgot you and other considerations,' said Douglas calmly, as he thought of the gentle Violet, and saw in the rude old man before him only her father.

'You are right ; so now let us part,' said the latter. 'This cheque will cover your quarter's salary, with an extra sum in lieu of a month's notice.'

'Thanks,' said Douglas, who coloured, and then laughed, as he placed the document in his pocket-book.

'I shall, of course, be able to give you a character for strict honesty and probity.'

'I go, Sir Jahleel,' said Douglas, quitting his chair ; 'I have done my duty here, honestly and well, and I had hoped in time to gain your entire confidence and be useful to you ; but there is one thing of which, I fear, you may rest assured.'

'And that, sir ?'

'Is, that you will never be Lord Torthorwald.'

'Never be Lord Torthorwald !' exclaimed Sir Jahleel in a new gust of rage and surprise ; 'because I choose to discard you, sir, do you dare to hint that Mr. Charters, a mere Scotch attorney, a W.S. or whatever you call him, by legal cunning, by the destruction or fabrication of papers, can keep me out of my just rights ?'

'Without the aid of such means he can and will, sir, and you will remember my words, though we shall never meet again.'

'You are mad, fellow !'

'Oh no,' replied Douglas, again smiling, as he locked his desk and laid the key on the lid ; 'and now good-bye, Sir Jahleel,' he added, and turning left the room.

'But for Violet's sake—I could find it in my heart to hate this selfish and underbred old man,' thought Douglas, as he hastily gathered together his few belongings and looked round his sleeping chamber for the last time ; 'and as for Violet, what faith, fealty, or sympathy do I owe her now ? *Into the world again* ; but with a cheque for fifty pounds odd—to seek for fresh fields and pastures new. Well—well ! under all the circumstances this is the best thing that could have happened to me ; but I wish I had discharged myself !' he added almost aloud, for though the taunts of Sir Jahleel concerning Violet had stung him to the very soul, he was deeply thankful that he had been able to preserve his temper, and had no harsh words to repent of or wish recalled.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LIGHT.

A LETTER from Sir Jahleel to Kate promptly informed her that he had rid himself of Douglas at last ; but loth to pain Violet now, she kept her counsel and remained silent on the subject.

The probable engagement with Sir Harry Honeywood was only, she supposed, a matter of time, and would come to pass in due course ; but an event altogether unforeseen by the wily and haughty Kate shortly occurred.

One day in Brighton, Violet saw Sir Harry, whom she thought was with his ailing relative in the Midland counties, issue from a shop with a lady—a rather flashily-dressed little creature, with very golden hair—a girl whose features were not unfamiliar to her, and to whom he spoke somewhat endearingly, as he handed her into a handsome private brougham. He then entered, closed the door, and they drove away westward together.

This *rencontre* gave Violet some food for thought. Why was Sir Harry in Brighton, when supposed to be elsewhere? and who was this showily attired girl, with whom he seemed to be on such terms of intimacy. He had no sister, or sister-in-law, as she knew from the baronetage; and a sense of mingled anger, disappointment, and pique filled her mind, for the manner and bearing of Sir Harry towards this lady betrayed an ease, and yet a certain indescribable *empressement*, that were rather startling in a man who was awaiting the reply that *she*—Violet Jermyn—was to give him.

She thought over all this in silence, as she strolled homeward through the lawn, paced the rose walks slowly, and felt a sense of mortification, which she shrank from confiding to the unsympathetic Kate; but her cause for marvel was not yet over.

Sir Jahleel was still in London, and Violet, having an appointment with her milliner, resolved to proceed there next day, join her father at his club, and avail herself of his escort home.

The servant who had accompanied her to the station, taken her ticket, seen her to a seat, etc., had touched his hat and withdrawn, when she felt a kind of shock on seeing the identical brougham which she had seen on the preceding day driven into the railway station, then pervaded by all the bustle usual upon the departure of a morning train to London; and next, to her utter dismay, she beheld, not Sir Harry Honeywood, but Douglas, alight therefrom, and, after a few parting words with the fair occupant, kiss his hand to her airily, and look about for a carriage, as she drove laughingly away.

Violet now knew why the girl's form was familiar to her; she

was the same bright-haired creature whom she and Kate had seen in the boat with Douglas. The lorgnette had shown all her features distinctly, and she had never forgotten them.

In another moment the face of that fair one's companion was at the carriage window—the handle of the door was turned—he entered and took his seat; and ere Violet could effect her escape and seek one elsewhere the door was sharply locked, the whistle sounded and off went the train.

Sitting with half-averted face, she dared not look at her solitary companion. She felt as if about to faint, and strove to lower the window on her side of the carriage, but her strength failed her.

She was full of surprise at his non-recognition, and her calm and beautiful, but expectant face filled Cospatrick (for he it was) with admiration and interest.

‘Allow me, pray,’ said he as he lowered the window; ‘the atmosphere is strangely close this morning—even for Brighton.’

The voice, though pleasantly modulated, and the manner, though eminently well-bred, were not those of Douglas, and her sense of intense discomfort and disconcertion turned to genuine surprise and fear.

Her face grew white as the thistle-down; she felt it become so. The strange likeness between this person and her lover turned her blood to ice. Could it be that there were two so closely resembling each other, even to that remarkable contraction in the haughty black eyebrows?

‘He has his tone, but not his voice,’ she thought; ‘his face and figure, but not his manner.’

Conceiving that to offer any more remarks would be intrusion, her companion proceeded very leisurely to cut up and peruse his morning paper. She watched him closely. The cast of features, the shape of his moustache, the complexion were all those of him who loved her; even to the form of his hands there was a resemblance, and he wore a well-fitting dust coat, cuffs and studs exactly like those of Douglas, whose gift they had been to the wearer. Her curiosity and interest became at

last quite irrepressible, and she ventured to say, when once his eyes met her own: 'You so closely resemble a friend of ours, that the likeness bewilders me.'

'Indeed,' said he, with a caressing smile, for her great beauty and manner could not fail to interest him.

'May I ask your name, sir?' said Violet timidly.

'Douglas.'

'Douglas—so *he* is named.'

'Sholto, is it?' asked the stranger, smiling.

'Yes,' replied Violet, in a breathless voice.

'Ah, then, I think I know whom you mean. I am his brother, Cospatrick,' he replied, but with a timid and hesitating manner, that seemed strange in one so perfectly a man of the world.

'I never knew he had a brother,' said Violet, after a pause.

'Very likely; he never speaks of me to the world he generally moves in,' replied Cospatrick, rather bitterly.

'The resemblance between you is wonderful.'

'True; we are like the two Dromios, and the similarity of appearance—even to the knit in the forehead—a family mark like that of the Lairds of Redgauntlet—has done my poor brother much mischief in many ways, as I am a kind of rolling-stone, gathering no moss, and many an escapade, folly, and weakness of mine have been scored down to poor, generous Sholto.'

With these words a great load was now lifted off the heart of Violet; a new light seemed to break upon her. Her face filled with eagerness and brightness, and such a vivacity of expression that Cospatrick Douglas thought he had never looked upon a lovelier one.

'You were once in the Austrian service?' she asked.

'Yes; and played the fool there.'

'And you met Captain Bramley of the Hussars at Monaco, and played heavily with him?'

'Yes,' replied Cospatrick, colouring slightly; 'but how do *you* know that?'

'Through those who mistook you for your brother.'

'Ah, likely enough,' said he drily.

'Did I not once see you in a boat at Brighton with the lady you have just left?'

'Likely enough,' replied he, colouring again; 'we paddle about there sometimes.'

'On one of those occasions then Sholto was mistaken for you.'

'By whom?'

'A girl who loved him tenderly—dearly, I know,' said Violet, making an effort to control her voice and her tears.

'Ah—what happened?'

'She cast him off!'

'The deuce she did! Poor Sholto! We should have half the globe placed between us.'

She had been schooling herself to forget—to live without the charm of Sholto's love, and the hope of his presence in the future; drilling herself to endure life without him, and to think of herself as the future wife of Sir Harry Honeywood; and now all his image came to her heart more powerfully than ever, with a keen sense of sorrow and dismay for the cruel wrong that had been done him.

'May I ask who the lady is that left you at the railway station?'

'Upon my word the question puzzles me,' said he, laughing; 'must I remind you of Bluebeard, and the fatal effects of female curiosity?'

'Pardon me—but I have more than one grave reason for inquiring.'

He regarded her gravely for a second or two, and then lifting his hat, said: 'Tell me—have I the honour of addressing a daughter of Sir Jahleel Jermyn?'

'He is my father,' she replied.

'And you—are you Miss Violet, to whom Sholto is so tenderly attached?'

'Yes,' said she, colouring deeply.

'I began to think so.'

'Why?'

'Through your questions and your knowledge of us both. I must, now that I have seen you, more than ever deplore the wrong I have most unwittingly done him, and a wrong which must be amended.'

'That shall be my task—if task it can be named,' said Violet, whose voice became steadier now; 'but about the lady with whom I have seen you?'

'Oh, don't talk of her,' said Cospatrick hastily, 'or rather, let me say, that I cannot talk of her to *you*. Men are but men——'

'And she?' asked Violet, with hesitation.

'Calls herself at times Lady Honeywood.'

'Lady Honeywood?' repeated Violet, in a breathless voice.

'But—but she is no more that than I am; so please let us change the subject.'

Thus an unexpected, a new and another light, came to Violet, and she found that 'there were more secrets in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in *her* philosophy.'

She lapsed into silence and thought as the train sped on, and after a time was only roused by some passing remark of her companion, whose general tone and habit of life seemed so unlike those of Sholto, that she was sorry he had such a relation at all.

'And when did you hear of your brother last?' she asked, as her renewed interest strengthened quickly.

'A week ago; he wrote me from Sir Jahleel's house in Belgravia, sending me some money, like a rare good fellow as he always is.'

'Poor Sholto!' said Violet, in that low, soft, and peculiar tone that always seems to come from the core of a woman's heart, when uttering—especially if it be for the first time—the Christian name of the man she loves.

Cospatrick looked at her earnestly. He was a great connoisseur in feminine beauty, and when he remarked the pensive mouth of Violet, her rich brown hair that at times seemed shot with gold, her long, dark eyelashes, and dark blue eyes, that had in them, as we have said in our second chapter, a soft

shade of tender melancholy, he thought that Sholto was greatly to be envied for possessing the love of a girl so beautiful and so single-hearted—so pure, and high-bred in expression and bearing.

‘Sholto has the heart of a prince!’ said he. ‘A good brother he has ever been to me, and I shall ever deplore that by a mistake I have marred your interest in him, even for a time.’

‘I shall see him as I leave London, and explain all,’ replied Violet emphatically.

‘And you will forgive the mischief I have done so unintentionally; for I have no more power over the wonderful likeness between us—though we are the sons of different mothers—than I have over the wind; and now I must bid you farewell—for this is my station,’ he added, as the train swept into Croydon.

He stepped out on the platform, and softly re-closed the door. She gave him her hand with great cordiality, then he lifted his hat respectfully, and disappeared among the passengers.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE VACANT CHAIR.

So the supposed duplicity of Douglas had been her own mistake after all! But Kate had been equally deceived, and had thought so too. How her heart filled with renewed tenderness, with great pity and yearning, as she thought of the cold, harsh, and unexplained episode of the returned ring—returned without a word of regret or comment. What must he have thought of her? Smouldering love, it is said, can be roused to a flame by the smallest spark. Would it be so now? Would Douglas, ‘tender and true’ pardon her when she told him all? Could she doubt it? A bright smile spread over her soft face as she pictured to herself the scene of their reunion—his arms round her—his kisses on her lips and hair—the ardour of his eyes—the dark knit smoothed from his handsome brow as the witchery of love swayed and swept all before it. But how if he who loved so well amid his cold hauteur and pride should

prove obstinate in his resentment and retribution? That idea was not to be thought of, nor to be tolerated for a moment; and she felt her soul filled with all the sweetness and the truth of the hackneyed aphorism that a lovers' quarrel is but love renewed. Strongly and strangely though Cospatrick resembled his brother Sholto, the closer observation and loving eyes of Violet had detected a considerable difference between them after a time. The former seemed much of a *vaurien* in habit and manner—a worn-out and dissipated man, who would be old before Sholto; yet a courteous gentleman withal.

'If I see Sholto,' thought Violet, 'and see him I shall! I will return with his ring on my finger again—his mother's ring—the dear fellow!'

Her business with the *modiste* in Regent Street had utterly passed out of her mind, and full of impatience she drove straight to Belgravia. If her mind, just then, reverted for a moment to Sir Harry Honeywood, it was to thank Heaven for the revelations that had been given her. On, on, through the familiar streets bowled the cab, and at last she reached the door of the house—the porch whereat she had first seen Douglas, when he assisted her to mount, adjusted her skirt, and gave her the gathered reins. How much had passed since then—and yet that day was but a few months ago! Her heart beat wildly and lightly, as she looked up to all the curtained and closed windows of the great house, in a little room of which she hoped to surprise him at his desk. Oh, how she longed to tell him all—that through all the time of their separation she had yearned for him, even though she deemed he was degrading her by playing fast and loose with herself and another.

To the old housekeeper, who had charge of the empty mansion, and who was surprised by her sudden arrival and haste, she scarcely accorded any explanation, but she hurried up the silent staircase and entered what had been the business room of Douglas, followed slowly by the housekeeper.

The apartment was empty. The writing-table was destitute

of writing materials or unopened letters ; it was covered with dust, and a spider had spun a web about the inkstand. The morocco-covered high-backed chair in which Douglas used to sit was drawn away and placed against the wall, and the room seemed not to have been used for days.

Was Douglas ill—absent from London—or what ?

She was speedily undeceived by the attendant.

Sir Jahleel had dismissed his secretary a week ago, and all correspondence had been sent to Gresham Street.

‘Dismissed him—and Mr. Douglas is gone!’ said Violet, whose heart seemed to stand still at these tidings.

‘Yes, miss—I am sorry for him—such a sweet young gentleman he is.’

‘Where is he gone?’

‘I can’t say, miss—no one knows—he left no address.’

‘Where do his letters go?’

‘Can’t say, miss—none have come here for him since he went away.’

‘And this happened a week ago?’

‘Just this day week, Miss Violet; but you look faint—shall I get you a glass of wine?’

‘No—thanks; but leave me. I have a note to write.’

The moment she was alone, Violet seated herself and looked about her in a kind of stupor. The silence around her was oppressive. She heard only the beating of her heart and the hum of the flies against the window. He was gone—gone out into the bitter, heartless world again, to fight the battle of life, and whither none could tell her.

This was the meeting to which she had looked forward with such impatience since she had left Cospatrick. Already an age seemed to have elapsed since she parted from the latter. Surely he must know of Sholto’s whereabouts; but it was evident he knew nothing of this recent event, otherwise he would have mentioned it. But where was Cospatrick to be found?

She was ignorant that this ubiquitous personage rarely made

'Were there not another man in the world than Sir Harry Honeywood, I would not marry him!'

And when she was brought face to face with him, in the presence of Sir Jahleel, to the exasperation of the latter, her refusal of his hand was equally decided, and he rode away from Barons Hall rather crestfallen, and more perplexed by thinking of the probable chaff of his friends, than the handsome girl he had lost, he knew not precisely how or why.

'She doesn't know her own mind yet, and I may have her after all,' thought he, as he indulged in a soothing and meditative cigar; 'and now, I wonder why those fellows, Bramley, Tandem, Puck and Co., are so deuced anxious to see me running in double harness. They've made up a book on the coming event, no doubt. And though Tom Tandem has flirted, even made love scores of times, it has always been in a careless, languid fashion peculiar to himself, and he has always eluded every attempt against his own personal freedom—sharp fellow, Tandem! But as for *la belle Violette*, I don't know what the deuce to think of this sudden change in her mind,' thought he, puffing away the smoke of a large regalia.

And so she had again refused the wealthy Baronet, whom so many matchmaking mothers had so long marked for their prey!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SEPARATED.

SIR JAHLEEL had utterly lost all patience with Violet, and she had much to endure from the petulance and natural harshness of his temper; thus many an incidental remark stung her deeply. He could not understand—apart from her regard for Douglas—the delicacy and purity that dictated, or inspired, her refusal of Sir Harry.

Kate, of course, did; but Douglas she considered altogether a mysterious person, and, taking a colder or more sordid view of human nature, she thought the discovery of his recent entanglement was nothing; that all men were alike; that Sir

Harry was no worse than his fellows who had their wild oats to sow, and would make a fair average husband, whom marriage would tame, and whose title and estates made him a very eligible *parti*.

To make Violet an offer of marriage, especially for the second time, and be rejected, involved, or meant now, the relinquishment of the family circle at Barons Hall and to Kate, who was not without some secret ambition of her own—that, failing Violet, he might conceive a fancy for herself—this was a bitter pill, and when the Hussars marched from Brighton to other quarters, the chances of their ever meeting again were slender.

He was a man of good position, and as such, with all her own beauty and money, interesting to her.

‘It has been your insane fancy for this fellow, Douglas, that has marred your prospects for life,’ said Sir Jahleel sternly to Violet on one occasion.

‘If they are marred, papa, it is not that alone which has done so.’

‘You admit that you did then, as you call it, love him?’

‘Yes—papa,’ said Violet softly and timidly.

‘Fool!’

‘Oh, papa, it was long ere a word fell from his lips that implied his regard for me; yet seeing and knowing intuitively his goodness—I loved him too—even as he loved me,’ she added, her tears falling as she spoke.

‘Fiddlestick—intolerable!’ snorted Sir Jahleel; ‘when this kind of twaddle begins, common-sense ends!’

And now days and weeks passed on, but no tidings ever came to the Jermyn circle or to Violet of the missing Douglas.

She secluded herself much in her own room, and often sought the most retired walks of the garden, avoiding, if possible, paying visits or receiving visitors; and often in these hours of unavailing brooding and regret there came to her memory the verse of a very sweet poem:

‘The night wind’s moan sounds joylessly
In the ivy of crumbling towers;

The sunshine's warmth falls fruitlessly
On the stubble and withered flowers,
The salt briny waves roll ceaselessly
O'er the sands of the barren shore,
And hearts full of love droop hopelessly
For the loved who are seen no more.

How she longed for the return of Dolly, the bright, the joyous, and sympathetic; but Dolly was then with Vincent, in the full enjoyment of her bridal tour, where lofty Mount Pilate looks down on the Lake of Lucerne.

Violet's natural love of music came back to her again, and she played at times; but ever and anon would pause dreamily, and often with eyes full of unshed tears, as she seemed to fall mechanically upon some piece that she and Douglas had played and sung together.

And as music, like perfume, acts powerfully on the memory and the fancy, there was one evening in particular when she sat thus, playing dreamily, with eyes fixed vacantly on the demesne of Barons Hall, when the sun's red rays were falling aslant upon the stately old trees, she started from her seat, as she almost seemed to feel that he was by her side once more.

'Oh no—oh no! never more—never more!' she whispered to herself and covered her face with her hands, and she bowed her head down on the instrument. 'If he could know—if he could but know how I have been worked upon, deluded, and deceived.'

On that evening she might have seen—had she been furnished with the magic telescope of the fairy tale, or Aunt Margaret's mirror, of the old Edinburgh legend—Douglas amid surroundings that would have filled her with great sorrow and dismay.

The evening sun, shorn of his beams and half his glories, among the dun smoke and dusty haze of the vast city, was shining on the muddy waters of the Thames, on dome and spire, and the masts of unnumbered shipping, while a great steam transport—the *Upnor Castle*—filled with troops, was receiving on board the last of these and of her stores, alongside the jetty at bustling Woolwich.

To his town-weary eyes—wearing alike of the monotony and bustle of London streets—the scene around him now seemed from its very novelty startling and something unreal, as it was, in every way, one on which he had never looked before, and never borne a part in. For in London, vast, overdone, and overgrown, his life had been spent of late as if ‘fenced from the beauty of earth by a wilderness of walls, the glory of heaven screened by smoke, the air thick and foul with the breath of men,’ till he almost forgot there were such pleasant places as the parks, or that there were breezy commons such as Barnes and Wimbledon, with the gorse, green and golden, and the perfume of foliage coming on the passing wind.

On this evening the bustle on board the departing ship was at its height. Already she had received on board some million rounds of ammunition for rifles and carbines, tons of cartridges and live shells for seven and nine pound field-pieces; blankets and sand-bags by the thousand; preserved meat, filters, carts, and field forges, had all gone down into her capacious womb, and for days past the derricks had been at work and men had been going up and down ladders and tramping the decks as if the curse of perpetual motion had been imposed upon them; and even at night, by the aid of lanterns, the work went on the same; for Her Majesty’s power had been menaced in South Africa, and here, as at Portsmouth and elsewhere, armaments were being fitted out in hot haste.

That day the infantry, and cavalry too (in their white helmets), had been embarked, and the latter, to the number of 250, had their horses slung on board—the shipment of each occupying about two and a-half minutes only, the kickers being put into spare stalls, the others arranged as they had been in the habit of standing in their troop-stables, as horses stand and feed more quietly when they know each other. The canvas head-collars were all fitted, and the ventilation wind-sails were all ready rigged.

The troops had speedily been berthed, the messes told off,

the rugs and blankets issued, the arms carefully racked, the ammunition stowed ; the myriad returns required by the insane system of red-tapeism had been signed ; but still the bustle and tramping of feet went on all over the ship, and the ascending and descending of ladders seemed to be the sole occupation of hundreds of men ; and to the uninitiated eye of Douglas the whole scene was a singular one.

The soldiers were having their first evening meal on board ; all were merry as crickets ; and, in the exuberance of their loyalty, some were singing the national anthem, and the voices in chorus came up a hatchway—the chorus varied thus :

‘ Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Three pound of beef among four of us—
God save the Queen !’

In a rough grey tweed suit and a billycock hat, with a field-glass slung over his shoulder, Douglas was, perhaps, the only man there who did not wear a uniform of some kind.

Soothed by the bustle around him, yet solitary, Douglas stood on the bridge, unnoticed and unheeded, unknown and a stranger to all, looking at the strange scene, the distant trees on Shooter’s Hill, the haze, the river, the dim dome of St. Paul’s, the church spires, the roofs and chimneys of North Woolwich, tinted variously by the sun’s declining light, and on many another object his eyes might never look on again ; for though he was going far away, self-exiled, his heart yearned to the land he was leaving.

He had contrived, through Mr. Sheldon, to procure a passage to the scene of war on board the *Upnor Castle*, as a friend of the captain, paying his own messing, etc., of course ; he had seen to his berth, and placed therein his few worldly goods—a strong portmanteau, a comfortable cloak, a plain unornamented tropical helmet, a good-cutting cavalry sword, a rifle, and a brace of revolver pistols, all carefully selected and paid for out of Sir Jahleel’s last cheque ; and now, with but a few pounds

in his pocket, he was going forth to forget the past if he could, to seek fame, such as it could be, at the Cape, or death, should that be his doom, as it was the doom of many. His object was to volunteer for service with any corps that would take him.

Why had Violet dared to trifle with him? he was thinking now, with the knit deep in his forehead. With whom was she in love now, who might be toying with her, hanging over her, tending her even at that very moment? For whom had he been discarded, and wherefore? He shivered, as if with cold, when these ideas occurred to him with persistent iteration. To a man with such rigid ideas of caste and race as he—though poor as to possessions—these thoughts were very stinging.

‘I thought she loved me for myself alone, and there was glory in the idea,’ he muttered; ‘her father’s mere dependent, a penniless man. How cruelly have I been mistaken! But, thank Heaven, I may cure myself of the folly of loving her in the land I am going to. . . . It is strange to think of age at six-and-twenty; but we may meet again, perhaps by chance, some thirty years after this (such things happen), when she is a grandmother, and both of us are grown old—so old that even my present emotions will be utterly forgotten by me. Well, well, it is a great consolation that all things are the same to us a hundred years hence.’

So chewing the cud of fancy that was more bitter than sweet, he muttered between his teeth: ‘There was a time when even an empty title with a sharp sword was inheritance enough for a Scottish gentleman—so why not *now* as then!’

Anon a gush of great tenderness would come into his heart, and he felt that he could yet forgive her all, and reflected—‘It is not the thought of dying out there, in a strange land—of being laid among those whom I never knew, and who knew me not—that haunts me, so much as the dread, above all other dreads, of never seeing or hearing more of you, my darling Violet!’

A minute before he had been vowing to forget her—so inconsistent or infirm of purpose is a lover; but recent tidings of

Violet were nearer than he could have imagined. How vividly she came before him in all her individuality, even to the shape of her slender hands and the contour of her little white ears; and both were something alone for a lover to adore.

Around him, mothers were seeing off their sons—wives their husbands—all pale and tearful; but our soldiers are so young now, that the former exceeded the latter. He felt lonely and friendless; every one—even the privates—seemed to have some one interested in their departure—some one on the jetty to wave a farewell to, or to whom a last fond letter was being written. He alone seemed to have no link or tie with the world he was leaving behind him.

'Ah,' he sighed, 'man is born to trouble, even as the sparks fly upwards—so said poor old Job, the most patient of Jews.'

'Bravo!' exclaimed a voice close by; 'glad to see you—here, too! By Jove, I am as glad as if I had backed the winning horse on the double event! You remember me—met you at old Jermyn's place in Belgravia, and at Lady Basset's garden party—Puxleigh, of the Hussars.'

Tommy Puck it was, in a tropical helmet and blue frogged patrol-jacket.

'Anything fresh in the evening papers?—seen the fourth edition of the *Globe*?' he continued. 'I grew sick of Piccadilly-super-Mare, the Pavilion, Marine Promenade, and all that sort of thing; got appointed on the general staff as an extra aide-de-camp. It is likely before the year is out that the whole corps will follow to the Cape, where I am now going in search of—of—'

'What?' asked Douglas, as Tommy paused and felt for the moustache that was sprouting.

'Well, a new sensation.'

'In that land of bullets, blows, and assegais, you are pretty sure to have it.'

'In what capacity are you going out—special correspondent, or what?'

Douglas explained his views.

'Deuced vague, going out in that way,' said Tommy; 'you may get knocked on the head without ever your name appearing in the *Gazette*.'

'Even if it did, who would be interested in it?'

'Who?' replied Puxleigh, with a puzzled air, as if utter friendlessness was beyond his comprehension; 'but why not get appointed to a regiment?'

'Too old for cramming for "exams," and all that kind of thing.'—'True.'

'I am sick of idling in London; sick, too, of the only kind of work I can get, and fighting suits my humour better.'

'If you get severely wounded?'

'Hope not. I would rather, as you suggested, get knocked on the head.'

'Well, I don't know,' said Puxleigh, puffing at a huge regalia; 'but I think that I would scarcely like to go out in this Quixotic fashion, if I were you.'

'But you are not me; and, in fact, I don't value life much now.'

'Why, "now?"'

The brow of Douglas knit, and his face darkened.

'I beg your pardon,' resumed the other; 'I have no right to ask. Besides, I have heard it said that there is always some mystery in every life.'

'Life itself is a mystery, Puxleigh; and I can assure you that there is more than I care about in mine,' said Douglas gravely. 'I am thankful to escape London, and the fogs and gloom of the coming *mois de morte*, as the French have it. Never have I, when down on my luck, felt more suicidal than in that overgrown metropolis—the ugliest in the world, with its dark Decembers and awful Januaries. Who cares for me there?' he continued with intense bitterness; 'and truth to tell you, Puxleigh, I would rather die by a chance bullet in Africa than of—well, hunger or prussic acid in yonder human wilderness!'

Puxleigh, a fair-haired and pleasant-looking young English-

man, with an open, joyous face, felt a little disconcerted by the other's outburst. It came of a frame of mind he failed quite to understand, but how different were the motives and fortunes of these two ! Puck, who had a yacht at Cowes, six hunters at Melton, and could spend his winters in Paris (if the spring drills were to be skipped), was going out almost ere he had attained manhood in search of 'a new sensation.' The sun was sinking now behind the outline of the higher ridge and buildings of Woolwich streets, stores, and arsenals ; the bugles were sounding the evening 'retreat' in the artillery barracks, but still the bustle prevailed on board the outward-bound transport.

'I am tired of this row, where every one seems busy as old Boots in a gale of wind,' said Puxleigh, 'so come into my crib of a cabin, and we'll drink a farewell glass to old England.'

'When did you see the Jermyns last ?' asked Douglas, in a casual kind of manner, when they were over their brandy and water in the crib referred to.

'Oh—about a fortnight ago—just before we marched to York. Honeywood's little affair is off in that quarter, as perhaps you know—off for the second time, I believe,' replied the Hussar, lying back in an Indian chair, with a leg over each long arm thereof, and a fresh cigar between his teeth.

'No ; was it ever on again ?' asked Douglas gently.

'I think so,' replied Puxleigh leisurely ; 'he proposed twice to *la belle* Violette, don't you know.'

'Twice ?'

'Yes ; odd, I think.'

'And she refused him ?'

'Yes, by Jove ! Tom Tandem and I had a little bet on the affair, and I lost a monkey to him.'

'She refused him, you say ?' repeated Douglas, almost incredulously.

'Fact—the title, Honeywood, acres and all.'

How did you come to know that ? Men don't usually speak of these things.'

'Tandem and I had it from his own lips one night. So she is still "in maiden meditation fancy free."'

After smoking in silence for some time Puxleigh—or Tommy Puck, as the corps invariably called him—spoke again.

'Queer business that about Dolly and her marriage before a registrar. Heard all about it, of course?'

'Yes,' replied Douglas, who had received a version of it, cautiously told by old Mr. Sheldon; but cared not to enter into the subject with his new friend.

'Fancy Dolly a married woman!' exclaimed the latter, with a laugh. 'A matron, by Jove! I always thought of her as one of Byron's misses:

"The nursery lips out in all they utter,
And then they always smell of bread and butter."

But Dolly was out and out the jolliest girl I ever met! By such a girl as Violet Jermyn one might well think that Honeywood would be hard hit; but he had another attraction elsewhere—the whole mess knew that.'

Douglas smiled disdainfully. On that subject he cared not to enter. It did not interest him; but he sighed wearily.

'Lie down and have a snooze,' said Puxleigh, kindly refilling his visitor's glass with brandy and water.

'Why?' asked Douglas.

'Because you look tired.'

'Tired I am indeed; this day has seemed a long, long one to me; and yet I cannot sleep.'

'Why so?'

'Because when a mind is so harassed as mine is, the body cannot sleep—well, at least.'

'I am sorry to hear this. All the worse for you. The reaction will be the more severe for you in time to come. Tip off your grog, and help yourself again, but excuse me for a time. I have promised to turn over a card or so with some of the staff, and must leave you. There goes the screw; by Jove, we are off at last!'

And leaving Douglas to his own reflections the speaker hurried away. Certainly he had now a wide field for speculation. The influence of Honeywood could not have caused the return of his ring so contemptuously, and led Violet to sever all the ties that bound him to her. Who or what, then, was the cause of the change in her sentiments?

The *Upnor Castle* was fairly under weigh now, but her propeller was only used from time to time, as in tow of a powerful tug she was steamed slowly down the crowded river; the lights on deck, save the binnacle lamps, were extinguished, as eight o'clock had struck. But many thousand lights and more were twinkling on the banks of the old winding Thames, and many a long, bright line showed the vista of a street, as she sped on her watery way; and Douglas, lost in reverie, lulled by the monotony of the motion and the rush of the water alongside, dropped into a slumber.

How long he had been asleep in Tommy Puck's cabin he knew not; but it must have been long after the mess-room lights had been extinguished, eleven p.m.; and as the vessel was not yet at sea, the officers were allowed to have lamps in their cabin after the privileged quarter of an hour later, thus, as he partially awoke, he could see that his host, who seemed to have had more wine than enough, was busily burning a cork at the flame of his lamp, and singing softly to himself the while.

Douglas affected to sleep, and when Puck called to him made no response.

'All right,' hiccupped the latter, and drew nearer still, humming his song.

'Oft in the stilly night' (he gave him a huge smudge down the nose), 'when slumber's chains' (a great eyebrow) 'have bound me' (another), 'fond memory' (large dot on one cheek) 'brings the light' (ditto on the other) 'of other days around me' (an imperial).

Tommy then contemplated the artistic effects with some satisfaction, threw open his patrol jacket, drained a huge bumper

of brandy and water—which, after all the champagne he had taken, proved a finisher—and, dropping into his chair, fell fast asleep—very fast indeed. Douglas was about the last man in the world to play a petty practical joke upon; but he could not find it in his heart to be angry with Tommy Puck, who had so freely put his cabin, his liquor, and cigars at his disposal, for the former, though somewhat of a goose, was a good-hearted young fellow, and in his loneliness Douglas was glad to make a companion of him. Even the fact of his having seen, known and danced with Violet was a kind of tie between them; yet he was quite inclined to give him a Roland for his Oliver. He took up the half-burned cork and smeared Tommy's face all over with right goodwill, and then retired to his own cabin—or berth, rather, as he had but a share of one; so when Puck came on deck betimes to have an early whiff of the morning air, to the astonishment and merriment of the watch, and to his own intense surprise, he was all tattooed over from ear to ear, like a New Zealander.

Next day saw the *Upnor Castle* clear of the Thames, and forging ahead at the rate of fourteen knots an hour.

She was to take on board more troops at Malta, and proceed, *via* the Suez Canal, to her destination, and it was expected the voyage would occupy about seven or eight and twenty days.

Tommy Puck's fun was only schoolboy fun, and the outcome of genuine animal spirits, and of a joyous disposition; but Douglas liked the lad, who could win him from his gloomy thoughts; and ere old Gib was sighted on the port-bow, to him, it seemed that his first meeting and last parting with Violet Jermyn must have happened in some remote and far-away past—the past of another existence.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY.

ABOUT a week after the departure of the *Upnor Castle*, Sir Jahleel, who had been for some days in London, was seated in his private business-room, at his offices in Gresham Street,

when little Mr. Penfold brought in a card, whereon was inscribed, 'Mr. Charters, W.S.'

'Show the gentleman in,' said he sharply—he was always, by nature and habit, sharp with his clerks; and remembering the parting words of Douglas, he felt no small interest and excitement at this unexpected visit, and almost felt himself already a peer of the realm!

'Good morning, Sir Jahleel, good morning; glad to see you looking so well, old friend!' exclaimed Mr. Charters, as he entered, a dapper, fussy, good-humoured looking little man of middle age, with bright, keen eyes, and that strange accent which is peculiar to the 'Parliament House' men of the modern Athens, and which, singular to say, is neither Scotch nor English, though they rather flatter themselves it is the latter.

'Be seated, Charters.'

'Thanks—have had a pleasant journey; left town by the Flying Scotchman, last night.'

'Why, you have just *come* to town,' said Sir Jahleel.

'You forget that there is one at each end of the line,' replied the lawyer, laughing; and then, after the usual commonplaces—the weather, and so forth, he said, with an expression of interest: 'Where, and how, is your secretary, Mr. Douglas?'

'Excuse me, but I neither know nor care.'

'How?' asked Mr. Charters, suddenly becoming grave.

'A presumptuous fellow—I have dismissed him.'

'Presumptuous—dismissed?' repeated Mr. Charters, looking partly aghast and partly amazed.

Surprised by his tone and manner, Sir Jahleel raised his gold-rimmed spectacles on his forehead, knit his brow and replied:

'Yes, he dared to—to be attentive to one of my daughters.'

'Miss Violet?'

'Yes, how do *you* know that?'

'Never mind. And she——'

'Well, I am sorry to say, that she has so far forgot herself as to be foolishly taken with the fellow. That is the worst of

it, as I have other and higher views regarding her than this penniless *protégé* of yours.'

'And he has left your house?'

'Of course.'

'And gone?—where?'

'I repeat that I know as little as I care,' replied Sir Jahleel impatiently. 'And now about my claim to the dormant title?'

'Did Mr. Douglas ever speak to you on the subject?'

'I often spoke of it to *him*; indeed, singular to say,' added Sir Jahleel a little pompously, with his head on one side and his eyebrows elevated, 'he seemed to know a good deal about the history of my family.'

'Your family! Of his own, you mean,' exclaimed his visitor.

'What do *you* mean, Mr. Charters?'

'That you have shown yourself to be about the biggest fool in all London!'

'Sir!' exclaimed Sir Jahleel angrily.

Mr. Charters exploded with pure and perfect laughter, to which Sir Jahleel listened with a would-be lofty frown.

'When you are quite done with this merriment,' said he, 'you will perhaps have the goodness to explain the cause of it.'

'Of what are you talking, man alive?' exclaimed the jolly little Writer to the Signet; 'why, the Mr. Douglas you have so ignominiously dismissed is *Sholto, Lord Torthorwald and Carlyle*!'

It may easily be supposed that some time, and no little amount of explanation, were required to convince Sir Jahleel of this startling circumstance, which overwhelmed him with mortification and mystification too.

'Yes,' said Mr. Charters; 'and this was the reason I found such a difficulty in assisting your views, in following up inquiries at foreign embassies and elsewhere, which I knew must be useless, and in answering your many pressing and important letters.'

'What an ass I have been!' exclaimed Sir Jahleel, thrusting his hands far down into his well-filled pockets.

'Ass, indeed!' was the polite addition of Mr. Charters,

'You have scouted, befooled—but been befooled I must say by—a noble-hearted fellow, the best and truest that ever bore the title of Torthorwald since the days of James VI.'

After a long pause, during which the two men kept looking at each other: 'How the —— came all this about?' asked Sir Jahleel, looking greatly ruffled.

'I always wondered that you, misled by some Cockney almanack, cherished this bubble of a peerage without due inquiry, that the lady of the late Lord Torthorwald predeceased him by some years at Rome, leaving a son named Sholto. The general ignorance of mankind is great,' continued Mr. Charters, almost angrily, 'and great indeed is the ignorance of most English folks on all that pertains to Scotland and its people.'

'What did he mean by imposing upon society in general, and upon me in particular, abetted by you, in this concealment of his rank?' asked Sir Jahleel, in anger at himself for what he had done, and disappointment at the extinction of his own hopes.

'Mean! why, that he was too poor to take his place as a peer in society. Sholto Douglas, Lord Torthorwald, might enlist as a soldier, but he could not starve, or dig, and to beg he was ashamed. He was too proud to ask for any of the good things our shuffling Ministry could give, and he did not disdain, till some better time came, to sink his rank and seek to live by honest industry; and I honour the lad for it! I proposed he should be your secretary, knowing you wanted one, and a fine mess you have made of the whole affair.'

'How the deuce was I to know?' asked Sir Jahleel sulkily; then, as a sudden light seemed to break upon him, he exclaimed, 'Sir Harry Honeywood must have known this!'

'Of course he did, but gave his word for secrecy to Douglas, whom he had previously known as an Honourable, and as the Master of Torthorwald.'

'He was ever so peculiarly and nervously reticent about his part, that I, not unnaturally, thought that—that——'

'There was something to be ashamed of?'

‘Yes; and Kate thought so too.’

How more prone in man to impute evil than good to a motive! Sir Jahleel, of course, said nothing now of his forgotten fears of a collusion between his secretary and Joab Scrowle.

‘He was always a loose fish, the late Lord Torthorwald,’ resumed Mr. Charters; ‘a dandy and a dissipated man-about-town in his time. He spent his patrimony and his wife’s portion too, and had been compelled for years to live in exile, a sad and broken man, often under a false name. Amid this strange career, Sholto was born and bred to lead a Bohemian kind of life, though Master of Torthorwald. His father, Lord William, who had been the enemy of every Government, a fractious and peculiar man, left him at his death the barren title (as the pittance that he had died with him), a couple of portmanteaus, and a mass of unpaid bills, due in Paris, Rome, Naples, and everywhere else. The lad was on my hands, his father’s legal adviser. Too old for the army, as things exist now; too proud to supplicate either Liberal or Conservative, he resolved to push his way in the world as plain Mr. Douglas. You know the rest, and may guess how preposterous I, knowing who he was, deemed your claim to the title of this grand old warlike race, whose swords were never idle in the scabbard when Scotland had need of them!’

‘I consider that I have been most unfairly treated,’ grumbled Sir Jahleel; ‘unfairly treated, and imposed upon.’

‘Poor Sholto found himself without a shilling in the world; even the roofless castle of Torthorwald had long since passed out of the family; he was without a profession, so what was he to do?’

‘There is some one about town whom he knew, and who closely resembles him. In fact, to use a common phrase, they are alike as two peas.’

‘Ah! his brother, or rather half-brother, Cospatrick—a bad lot; and in that respect more like their father than poor Sholto. I never doubted but that he would fall in love with one of your handsome girls—quite looked forward to it, indeed,’ continued

this provoking little lawyer, with another explosion of laughter. 'I never thought he would be so romantic as to preserve his *incognito* to her, and more than all, I was quite unprepared for a catastrophe like this. He has not written to me for weeks; so where the deuce can he be? or what is he doing? Oh yes! I knew well how matters were progressing between him and Violet; he kept me *au fait* at all that.'

'You knew, and yet kept me in ignorance!' said Sir Jahleel reproachfully.

'I did. He had won her heart, and knew that she had a large fortune, while he was penniless, and honour long tied his tongue, though he was possessor of a title, as Baron, second scarcely to none in the realm. But for that knowledge—the knowledge he had something to offer in return—do you think he would have stooped to play the part you *thought* he did in your household? Oh! Sir Jahleel, you little know the lad you have insulted, and driven like a nameless beggar, as you deemed him, from your luxurious mansion in Belgravia!'

Sir Jahleel was silent. He remembered how coarsely he had 'insulted' his secretary, even to taunting him as a *chevalier d'industrie* in that conversation, which seemed so awful now, when the traces of the great correspondence which he had maintained with Mr. John Charters were fully explained.

'I remember in one of your letters to me you mentioned that a "curious mistake has occurred which may upset all our plans,"' said Sir Jahleel; "'but that, if explained, the title of Torthorwald would be secured to my family and heirs in perpetuity." May I ask what that mistake was?'

'Your daughter's quarrel with Sholto, and the blunt return of the ring. Was it ever explained?'

'I think not,' replied Sir Jahleel uneasily, as he recalled the episode in which Cospatrick's resemblance to Sholto had been so successfully utilized by Kate at Brighton. 'You'll dine with me at my club this evening?'

'No, thanks; excuse me.'

‘Why?’

‘To tell you the truth, Sir Jahleel, I am rather disgusted with the result of this matter of Lord Torthorwald, and I wish to think over future plans for him,’ said the other coldly.

Mr. Charters, soon after all this conversation, took his departure, leaving Sir Jahleel full of very conflicting and bewildering thoughts indeed.

One astounding fact stood clearly out—that plain, modest, and quiet Mr. Douglas, the private secretary of a City merchant, earning a pittance by the use of his pen, was the Lord Torthorwald and Carlyle, after all—heir of a long and lordly line.

To the hopeless loss of his fondly-looked-for peerage—that vision which was the joy of Kate’s heart—was now added the deepest regret for having lost a peer for his son-in-law. So Sir Jahleel set out for Brighton, on his return to Barons Hall, a sadder and wiser man. ‘Poor Violet,’ thought he; ‘she is very single-hearted after all. She gave up such a husband as Sir Harry Honeywood with such stables and equipages, lands, and rent-roll, for one she deemed my poor secretary, little wotting that he was the true Lord Torthorwald; but though he has not a sixpence, I have plenty, and might well be proud of having such a son-in-law. After all he was—is—a fine fellow, I always liked him, I think, somehow; but——’

Sir Jahleel paused, failing to finish his ‘but,’ even to himself.

Returning to Barons Hall, full of schemes and plans to discover Lord Torthorwald’s whereabouts, to have some explanation, and have him into his family circle again; full also of extreme mortification, disappointment, and anger with himself and the world in general; not a little, too, at ‘that Mr. Douglas,’ as they were wont to name him, whose modesty, humility, and reticence they totally failed to understand, he was met by Kate, pale, terrified, and in tears, who gave him the startling intelligence that Violet had disappeared that morning—gone just as Dolly had done before her; but whither or with whom there was nothing to show. But gone she was certainly.

CHAPTER XL.

VIOLET'S SILENT VOW.

We must retrograde in our story a little. Though Violet had neither the magic mirror nor the enchanted telescope referred to in a preceding chapter, she was not long in discovering, to a certain extent, the intentions and whereabouts of him whom she only knew as yet by the plain name of Sholto Douglas. It was some weeks after the departure of the latter in the *Upnor Castle*, and while Sir Jahleel was absent in London. The day was a dull, depressing and wretched one in October; the rain was falling in a thick drizzly mist, causing even those whose lines were cast in pleasant places, and who sat near jovial sea-coal fires, to feel chilled in body and—perhaps they knew not why—despondent in heart, so subject are we to atmospheric influences, when ‘it is yellow autumn, no longer divided from summer by the plummy leaf and lingering flowers, but with features of its own, marked with slow decay;’ when everywhere the leaves are falling, though a few hardy apples remain in the orchard to ripen in the coming frost; when the few notes uttered by the birds come on the sighing wind; and when low feelings are produced, of which we are seldom sensible in any other season of the year. Violet, after trying to cheer herself by the fire in the inner drawing-room, betook her to the recess of a window, and looked out on the dreary prospect. In the middle distance of the landscape, now blurred in its features by the misty rain, she could see the hedges of the close-clipped maze or labyrinth, where she and Sholto had sealed the bond of a love that each had thought would end only with death, and not even then, while one survived; and how much had she, and how much must he, have suffered since then! Like him, she had never forgotten the long and tender leave-taking in yonder maze. If anything—if any words—could make an engagement solemn, the words spoken then, the kisses interchanged—made it so; and yet it had been broken off by herself, though she

had given herself to him, with all the passion of her soul, as Juliet did to Romeo. And what must Sholto think now? Oh, could she but tell him all, and how fondly she still treasured the memory of that time, and of the first and last kiss he gave her! Years may wing their flight—it has been written—oceans may roll between, and miles of land divide the forms; but the memory of the bliss, snatched as it were from Paradise, lingers for ever.

‘When did I first begin to love him—and when did he first begin to love me?’ she mused; ‘poor fellow—poor fellow! Oh, could I but tell him how we have been tricked—how wickedly imposed upon!’

How well she could recall the expression of his face on many an occasion, but more particularly at Lady Bassett’s garden-party at Richmond—the olive-tinted, clear-cut face, the tender eyes, so dark by day, so black by night; the knit in the handsome brow, that a word, a smile, more than all a caress from her, even the touch of her hand, could smooth out and cause almost to disappear.

A curtain heavily festooned in a massive arch divided the inner from the outer drawing-room, and she was now roused by voices there; and the utterance of Douglas’s name by her sister Kate caused her to listen intently, without moving. She was conversing with Captain Bramley, who was lingering about Brighton on leave, and having been out that day with the harriers, took shelter at Barons Hall on his homeward way.

Kate had in her hand a letter, which proved to be one from Vincent Sheldon, then at Lucerne, in which he mentioned having received a letter of congratulation on his marriage from Douglas, and Violet’s eyes sparkled at the slighting remarks she heard made upon the latter, and then she gave a kind of short and convulsive sob at what followed.

‘And what more does he say about the fellow, Miss Jermyn?’ asked Bramley, pulling his moustache superciliously.

‘That he has gone as a volunteer, after his dismissal by papa.’

‘A volunteer—where—to Wimbledon?’

'No,' replied Kate, laughing, 'to the Cape.'

'If he plays his cards there as well as he did at Monaco he will make a fortune,' said Bramley, still thinking only of the *roulé* Cospatrick; 'anyway, I think Sir Jahleel is well rid of him.'

'I agree with you,' rejoined Kate cordially; 'I never liked him and his insufferable air of perfect self-possession.'

'If he gets knocked on the head at the Cape it won't matter much to the world at large, or even anyone in particular, I suppose.'

Violet felt suffocating; she could listen to no more, but softly stole away to her own room, ere her presence could be discovered. Then she flung herself into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and strove to think.

Gone away to the distant land of peril, suffering, and slaughter! She would too probably never see him again—that tall and handsome Douglas, so gentle in manner, yet proud in bearing, so noble and single in heart; never again would she hear his voice uniting with hers in song; never again would she live the life of sunshine she had—though brief it was—lived with him.

Henceforth their paths in this world must lie far apart indeed, since half the world itself would be between them.

Then she would think—and in this her thoughts resembled those of Douglas—he might return to London a middle-aged man, when she was a middle-aged woman, and each might, in the course of time and circumstances, have formed other ties, and forgotten their love for each other, if perhaps they did not view it with a smile. How strange and unnatural that idea seemed to Violet *then*! Slowly had the days passed with her since that visit to London, when so much had been revealed to her; and though she was surrounded by gaieties, her heart recoiled from them almost morbidly.

She could but think only of Douglas and of the strange light in which he must view her now!

Other thoughts with these now came, through Vincent Sheldon's tidings.

Could she but write to him, and tell all she had learned through her meeting with Cospatrick! A volunteer? With what force or corps was he serving? Under whom, and in what capacity? She failed to understand all this. Again, to what part of the Cape had he gone? It could only be to whatever part was the scene of warlike operations. Already she had become thin, white, and nervous, to the sorrow of Kate and the exasperation of her father, who thought her 'a fool for throwing away her chances upon moonshine in the water.'

But now she became more nervous, and spent half-sleepless nights, picturing horrid episodes of her ill-used lover dying in the land of an enemy, surrounded by the slain, or stretched dead in some rude hospital, on a straw pallet, without a friendly hand to close the eyes that had so often looked with love into her own. Often did she dream of him—see him—hear his voice, and strive to reach him; but some impassable or invisible barrier kept them apart; and then, with a start and a sob, she would awake.

Kate, by nature hard and cold, lost patience with her, as Sir Jahleel had done, and bitterly resented this 'moping after an adventurer,' as she called him, and once, in the extremity of her anger, she said: 'If he is killed off at the Cape, it is the best thing that can happen for all parties; and then, I hope, Sir Harry will have a chance of receiving some countenance.'

'Oh, Kate, Kate, have some pity!' said Violet imploringly. 'Death!—oh, no—not death!'

So true it is, wrote one who is now no more, that 'when we love and are young, the being we love wears a charm against all harm. Death, which can lay whole kingdoms desolate and level nations in the grave, has no power over the beloved of a young heart.'

After all that had occurred, Kate's cruel words filled Violet with an emotion of anger that was quite new to her, together with genuine indignation at the trick that had been played upon her and Douglas, with much of the feeling that she was

being treated as a child. A sudden idea seized her, and upon it she was resolved to act at once.

A flush covered her pale face, a lustre lit her upturned eyes, as she raised them and her tightly interlaced hands to heaven and uttered—but to herself and in the inmost recess of her heart—a *vow* she made then, and meant to keep at all hazards—all the more so that the recent affair of Joab Scrowle had loosened much of Sir Jahleel's influence over his own family.

If they still loved him as much they did not quite respect him so much as before. In the night, when all thought she was abed, Violet, with her cheeks blistered by tears, and her hands hot and tremulous, busied herself in the preparations for the fulfilment of her intention. She paused at times, fearing that the line she meant to adopt might be deemed eccentric, unfilial, even unlady-like; but others had pursued, and were pursuing, the same course now. And why should not she?

Why not, especially when Kate and her father were so studiously harsh and unkind to her that home was home no longer.

She made careful selections from her wardrobe of garments that were plain and wearable. She made up the best of her jewels, feeling almost guilty as she did so, into a packet; among them a collet necklace of the purest brilliants, each stone being as large as a pea. She made all her preparations in hot haste lest the return of her father might arrest them, and by the aid of an under-gardener had her portmanteau conveyed to Brighton, on the pretence that its contents were going to some charitable institution; and after long and fervent prayer she quitted Barons Hall, just as Dolly had done before her; but remembering the grief and consternation caused by the flight of the latter, she left a letter on her dressing-table, addressed to Kate, in which, after imploring the continuance of her sisterly love, and her father's forgiveness, she added:

'I have left home in fulfilment of a vow, which I have called upon Heaven to register.' ('Oh, she has gone mad!' moaned Kate, when she read this.) 'What that vow is I shall not tell

you yet, or till I am safe beyond all pursuit, lest papa should take means—and I know that he could, and would take such—to stop me. Do not attempt to track or trace me. To do so would be useless. I have matured my plans too well ; but be assured that, if spared, I shall return when I have accomplished that which I mean to do. Kiss Dolly, when she comes home, and papa, for me too, dearest Kate. God bless you all, and good-bye.'

The firmness with which the letter was written, from the first word to the last, showed that her heart and hand had been alike steady, and she was resolute to her purpose. But what could that purpose be? Conjectures were endless, and at this critical time Sir Jahleel arrived at Barons Hall, with his budget of news, to be met by the even more startling tidings of Kate.

Oppressed though she was by the subject of Violet's disappearance, on learning now *who* Douglas proved to be, she recalled all her bitter and slighting speeches—her asides, and her cutting coldness ; the night she had so boldly called him a *parvenu* to her father, urging his instant dismissal, and her heart died within her ! A fatality seemed to attend the family now. All this situation of affairs was bewildering and exasperating indeed. Now that Sir Jahleel knew what a fool he had been, and *who* Douglas was, he might easily trace him, follow him up, explain all—he was mean enough to do so, and to work upon the discarded secretary's affection for Violet ; but where was *she* gone ? This was a new horror and disappointment most bitter to face. He repented of the high hand he had taken and severity he had used with her, in the matter of Sir Harry Honeywood, but felt himself in some way a species of King Lear, though 'no woman's weapons, or water drops,' stained his cheeks.

'She was never so dutiful as you, Kate,' was his unjust remark in his anger.

But truth to tell, none was hard-hearted, or so like himself in disposition, as the fair, handsome, and refined looking Kate.

'Where can she have gone, and without money ?' he surmised, the latter being, perhaps, the first thing he always thought of.

'She has taken her jewels, papa—even to her diamond necklace,' replied Kate, weeping genuinely for the loss of her sister, the danger in which the latter might involve herself personally—a girl so beautiful and gently nurtured; and the turmoil, surmise and scandal her absence, if protracted, would be certain to cause.

Sir Jahleel set the wires at once to work, after discovering through the servant who carried her portmanteau to Brighton that she must have taken the train to London. His solicitors were communicated with; they in turn set detectives on the track, who discovered that a collet necklace and other jewels had been resold to his own jewellers in Bond Street, to their great surprise, by Miss Violet Jermyn, who received a considerable sum for them; and then all traces ended, though hope did not.

There was no doubt that she was somewhere in London, was the dictum of the gentlemen at Gray's Inn, as there was no place in the world where one could preserve their *incognito* so easily. But then came the question, why did she wish to seek seclusion from her own family in this mysterious way?

The latter had escaped but narrowly the scandal that the Joab Scrowle affair involved, and now here was another miserable fiasco. Till time and reflection would make her repent and return, or means could be found to trace her, Kate and Sir Jahleel gave out that she was visiting some friends on the Continent; but time passed on from days to weeks. Dolly came home from her wedding tour to find only dismay, disappointment and perplexity at Barons Hall. The fogs of November came—the pioneers of winter—the swine were rooting in the desolate cornfields among the black and rotten stubble, the hedgerows looked cold and naked, and the rain rained every day, and the damp and decaying leaves rolled before the gusty wind; an odour as of death was coming from the slimy water-flats and rotting sedges; but no tidings came of the lost one.

Even Christmas drew nigh; the Reverend Octave Bede began the decorations of his porch and chancel, a process during which he attempted to mingle spiritual advice with a little mild

love-making to Kate, who was not so crushed in heart that she could not repulse him ignominiously; but still there was no Violet, and Sir Jahleel and his daughter began to look each other pityingly and blankly in the face.

To what end had been her silent vow? Enigmatically worded advertisements were put in the *Times* and *Standard* by the solicitors at Gray's Inn, but to none of these came the slightest response, and keen anxiety became united to the gravest alarm.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HEERENLOGEMENT.

LORD TORTHORWALD—or Sholto Douglas, for he was still resolved to preserve his incognito—was entering on a new world and a new life now.

The war in the Transvaal, which we annexed in 1877—of all our dominions the most remote—had just begun, and was not yet at its height, though the names of Paul Kruger, Joubert, Dirkus, and Foucher had become familiar in our mouths 'as household words,' while stories of their treachery in firing on us under flags of truce, of assassinating individuals, and more than all, their pitiless slaughter of a party of the 94th Regiment, filled the hearts of all at home, in the Cape Colony, and of the troops especially, with a just longing for vengeance.

It is fresh in the minds of many still, how a party of the 94th, when marching with a long convoy of waggons in the vicinity of Heidelberg, before any declaration of war had been made, was met by two Boers with a letter calling upon the commanding officer to surrender. Ignorant that the rocks and hills around him teemed with riflemen lying *en perdue*, Colonel Anstruther, whose soldiers had piled their arms by the wayside, and had their shoulders at the waggon wheels, like active and earnest fellows as they were, urging the convoy over a rough and precipitous road, refused to accede to a demand so unexpected, so unexplained and humiliating.

Then in a moment the whole vicinity became filled with fire and smoke ; thunder seemed to shake the hills ; a storm of bullets destroyed the whole escort, or nearly so, as more than eight thousand rifles opened on them. A few were taken prisoners to Heidelberg ; all the officers were killed or wounded and eighty-six soldiers were buried on the field.

Thus, by a wholesale deed of assassination, was inaugurated, in the first days of January, the disastrous war in the Transvaal.

It was some weeks after this event that Douglas, accompanying the young aide-de-camp, Tom Puxleigh (*alias* Puck), who was going to the front with despatches, put up at the Heerenlogement (or lodging for gentlemen), the only inn of the village of Windvogel, near Pietermaritzburg. Unlike the generality of inns or hotels in that part of the world, where they are meagre in accommodation, dirty, and uncomfortable, the Heerenlogement was a large and spacious one-storied house, of an exceptional kind, for the keeper thereof, Jan Van Beer, was a Fleming, who had long kept an Estaminet at the Schotte-poorte, or Scottish Gate of Bruges, near St. Giles's Church there.

The principal apartment and place of general resort was the inn kitchen. A large fire blazed in a spacious chimney, a fire that went searching and dancing into the furthest corners of the huge apartment, and its light was reflected in various vessels of resplendent brightness, that filled the open presses or lockers ; hams, jerked beef, onions, and quaint-looking baskets hung from the rafters, and the floor of hard-beaten clay was smooth and white beyond anything of the kind to be generally seen in Natal or the Transvaal.

On the fire hissed a great copper kettle, under the superintendence of the better half of Jan Van Beer, a stout and ample and jolly dame, with huge gold earrings, and near it knitting sat a pretty-looking Dutch girl, a guest, awaiting a waggon that was to come for her, and a picturesque feature she formed in that quaint interior, and one of no small interest to Tom Puxleigh, who made laborious and rather futile efforts to engage

her in conversation. She wore a skirt of scarlet woollen stuff, with a neat bodice, elaborately embroidered and stitched all over in Dutch fashion, for she was the daughter of the Heer Hendrik van Damberger, a farmer in the vicinity.

Gertrude—of whom more anon—was decidedly pretty for a Dutch girl, and over her fair locks wore a light sun-hat of plaited straw, with bright ribbons and long strings.

The only other guests were a few wayfarers, who sat at tables apart in corners, eating and drinking or playing cards, while in attendance on them was a Kaffir servant or waiter, who wore an old tunic of the 21st Scots Fusiliers, and nothing more, and at whom they frequently railed as being ‘a rascally Africander.’

Douglas and Tom Puxleigh had left behind them Pietermaritzburg, navelled among verdant hills, with its pretty shops, and its streets crowded by idle Zulus looking for work and food, some armed with assegais and knobkerries, though such are forbidden by law. The naked Zulus and Kaffirs seemed odd to the two Britons, as they do to all who see them for the first time; but to none more than Puxleigh, who was rather more than usually English in his ideas of the manners and customs of foreign nations, and found it difficult to realise the idea that these creatures were subjects of Queen Victoria.

In the rather unbecoming tropical white helmet now so generally worn, the dark face of Douglas looked handsomer than ever, and Gertrude van Damberger stole glances at it from time to time in the intervals of her knitting. He wore now a blue jacket of the patrol species, neatly braided; a shoulder-belt and pouch, a revolver, and a good cutting cavalry sword, so that he might serve with the Natal police, or any mounted force that was in the field, as he was resolved to make himself of use, and had procured letters of introduction to more than one commanding officer. As a Scotchman, he had easily picked up enough of Dutch to enable him to understand what the speakers of that language said; but poor Puxleigh was utterly at a loss, save when some of them ventured on a little broken English.

So now they were only about a hundred miles distant from the borders of the famous Transvaal, where, when Queen Victoria came to the throne, the lions roared in the uncultured waste, and the native tribes assailed and knobkeried each other's thick woolly skulls with hearty goodwill; and where now not a monarch of the wild and scarcely a native is to be seen. The Dutch Boer with rifle and shovel has swept all before him; but generations may come and go ere the whistle of a railway engine wakes the echoing kloofs of the Drakensberg range. This quaint-looking hostelry, the Heerenlogement, was to prove to Douglas the scene of adventures nearly as strange as any that happened in the old inns described by Smollet or Fielding in their novels. He and Puxleigh had dined, and were now lingering, cigar in mouth, over a bottle of Cape Madeira, and rather enjoying the novelty of the situation.

'I am a wanderer by habit and the force of circumstances, not by inclination,' said Douglas laughingly; 'but, by Jove, it was a curious turn of the wheel of fortune that brought me into this remote corner of the world.'

'A jolly girl,' said Tom, regarding the blooming Gertrude admiringly; 'I wish I could make her understand me. Ask her how many sweethearts she has?'

'I have none,' she answered demurely, when Douglas put this question in words of his own.

'None!' he exclaimed.

'Not one as yet,' she replied, smiling.

'And you so pretty! It won't be a case of "Nobody coming to woo me—nobody coming to woo."'

'I was never told that I was pretty.'

'Ah; the Boers don't know how to tell you that.'

'Perhaps no one ever thought so.'—'That is impossible.'

A great noise of wheels, the feet of oxen, and hoarse, guttural voices were heard outside the door, together with sharp cracking of a jambok or long whip of thongs, as some travellers arrived, and Jan Van Beer and his Kaffir help hastened to get

the team outspanned ; and in reply to a demand how far it was from Windvogel to the Klip river, the former replied, like a genuine Boer of the old country, that ' they were a good many pipes asunder—he knew not how many.'

It was impossible not to laugh at the Kaffir waiter in the red coat ; but Douglas reminded Puxleigh that the Queen had a hundred black subjects in her empire for every white one ; and now the new arrivals, two Dutch Boers, each with his *wrouw*, or wife, came tramping heavily and noisily in, and the great bronzed and stupid-looking visages of the former darkened on seeing the undress uniform worn by Douglas and Puxleigh. They had come to the Heerenlogement to put up for the night ; and the two Britons regarded them in turn with doubt and suspicion, for the Transvaal War being, as we have said, in its infancy, there was a difficulty in discriminating between friends and foes.

' Better here than out in the *veldt*,' said one Boer, with a very undeniable scowl ; ' but,' he added, '*eigen haard is goud waard*.' This Douglassknew to mean in plain Scottish the old proverb, 'Ane's ain hearth is goud's worth,' and the similarity made him laugh.

Each Boer—a term, by the way, which simply means a farmer—was a powerfully-built, muscular-looking man, with rather coarse and bronzed face. They were travelling in their every-day dress—wide leathern trousers, called in that country 'crackers,' loose, roomy jackets of brown stuff, well furnished with ample outside pockets ; on their feet were *feldt-schoenen* (or country shoes) of African unstained leather ; their waist-coats were of fawn skin, and each wore a large white felt hat, in the band of which one had a short white ostrich feather, and the other a tuft of vulture's pinions. In his broad leathern girdle each had a revolver and formidable bowie-knife, with a flask for schnaps hanging thereto. Each also had a short rifle, with a loose sling, and each, of course, had a long and large-bowled pipe, which he smoked vigorously.

' You travel well armed,' observed Douglas, as they placed their rifles noisily and with some swagger in a corner.

'People generally do here in these times, or when jaging *de wildebeest*' (i.e., hunting the gnoo), replied he of the ostrich feather.

They had not the courtesy to remove their hats, but ordered supper for themselves and their wives at a table a little apart, and glanced askance at Puxleigh and Douglas, who heard them muttering under their beards to each other of Slaughter's Nek—a famous hanging of Dutch revolvers about seventy years ago, to which the implacable Boers to this day refer as the Irish do to Cromwell's butchery of the women of Wexford, and the Highlanders to William's massacre at Glencoe.

Ignorant of the real political opinions of the new comers, though they might shrewdly suspect them, the subject of the Transvaal War was not mentioned even casually by Douglas or Tom Puxleigh, and when supper was over the Boers relaxed a hole or two in their belts and betook them to much heavy smoking and drinking, and chatting away in an undertone each with the other's wife, while all became gradually enveloped in vapour.

One vrouw was a very good-looking woman, with abundant hair of a rich warm chestnut colour; her eyes were large and even handsome for a Dutch woman, and almost roguish in expression; while her mouth was small and pretty, and her dress, which was of the brightest blue, became her well. The other, who wore a flaming crimson dress, was ample in size and motherly-looking, with black hair, but somewhat sulky, and disposed to resent the attention her husband began to pay her friend, as the potations succeeded each other. Supposing that the two Englishers knew little or nothing of their language, in their coarse, rough way, this quartette, as conversation proceeded, cared little about concealing their jealousies of each other, which seemed mutual.

'I don't wonder that Adam ate the apple in Eden now,' said the fair laughing vrouw to the other.

'Why?' asked her husband sharply.

'Because I believe I could make our friend Erasmus here eat a sackful to please me if we were in Eden to-night.'

'Ach Gott !' groaned her husband ; 'but you are in Windvogel and *not* in Eden to-night.'

'How can you be so sharp for a little speech,' said he whose name was Erasmus, 'and with a wife so pretty, too? Beauty is a great thing, Heer Van Bloom ; it is pleasant ; and a fair face is always pleasant to look upon.'

'For all that,' remarked *his* rib, sourly, 'like the plain one, it turns to dust in the end.'

'Those long pendants do so become your pretty ears,' said Erasmus to the other lady, in *sotto voce*, after a pause.

'Ach Gott ! you wore them to please him, I suppose,' said her husband bluntly.

'No, no,' she replied, laughing and showing a row of beautiful teeth ; 'as if I would wear anything to please anyone but you.'

'Ach, you are beginning to grow cautious, now that I have caught you,' said Van Bloom.

'Caught me?' exclaimed his wife inquiringly.

'He was pressing my foot in the waggon in mistake for yours ; that is all.'

'Nonsense ; don't look ill-tempered and make a fool of yourself, Van Bloom,' rejoined his wife gravely, adding, with some annoyance, '*Kleine potten loopen gaaw over.*'

This, which in Scotch is simply 'little pots sin rin owre,' made her husband more angry, and when, at the request of Erasmus, she took a final sip from his glass, he fairly lost his temper, and said :

'To bed now, and leave us to our pipes and the Cape smoke.'

Accompanied by a kind of chambermaid bearing candles, and the Kaffir waiter in the red coat, with their portmanteaus, the ladies withdrew to their mutual sleeping apartment ; separate bedrooms are very dear luxuries in that part of the world, and at the Heerenlogement of Jan van Beer no such accommodation was to be had,

Douglas had listened to the remarks of the quartette with some amusement, and translated them to Puxleigh, who, true to his character of Tommy Puck in the regiment, saw a means of having some mischief made, and, through the medium of a little German, contrived to make the two Boers, Erasmus and Van Bloom, aware that he was not indisposed to stand a bottle or two of Cape smoke and join their table, now that the ladies had departed.

'And not a bit too soon for them,' growled Van Bloom ungallantly; 'why was it that when the devil robbed Job of all his goods and good things, he omitted to take his wife?'

'You are hard upon the weaker vessels,' said Erasmus.

'St. Paul was right when he named them so,' was the response, for Van Bloom's temper was by no means improved by his potations.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DOUBLE-BEDDED ROOM.

JAN VAN BEER uncorked a couple of bottles of 'Cape Smoke,' generally called old Congo—a beverage with which all Europeans are unwise to meddle; so they were left to the Boers, while Douglas and Puxleigh adhered to their Madeira.

It was a puzzle to the former why the latter was so lavish in his hospitality to those two ungainly and unmannerly Dutch fellows, whom he plied with the fiery Congo, till they became very tipsy indeed. After an hour or so he left the quiet kitchen in which they were still seated, and in a few minutes returned with his bright, saucy English face radiant with fun and mischief.

'He is up to something,' thought Douglas; 'what on earth can it be? Master Puck never wears that kind of face for nothing.'

Resuming his seat at the table, he refilled the glasses of the luckless Boers, whose eyes were now staring in their heads, and whose articulation was slow and laborious indeed. The Vrouw van Beer and the pretty Gertrude had retired long ago; the

host was dozing in a species of pantry, and the Kaffir waiter had coiled himself up on a kaross, and gone fast asleep in a corner.

‘What are you about, Tom?’ asked Douglas in a low voice.

‘I am going to have a game with these fellows, a game they little suspect,’ replied Tom in the same undertone. ‘In the morning they will be shooting each other’s heads off.’

‘Take care, Master Tommy Puck—they are sullen brutes, and might cut up rough.’

‘Let them—it will be with each other if they do—not me.’

After a time Erasmus placed his two hands on the table, and struggled into an erect position, and Puxleigh gave his arm to Herr van Bloom, who seemed almost unable to move; but, suddenly and sullenly, the latter thrust his assistance aside, and glared at him and his uniform fiercely and defiantly.

Then his mood changed, and making a wild clutch at the arm of his friend, the two—each propped against the other—staggered off to the bedroom (where their wives, worn with the toil of a long journey, were now fast asleep) singing, or endeavouring to sing, the guttural war-song of the Transvaal Boers, which has been Englished, and begins thus:

‘Leave us alone—leave us alone!
You shall not rob us of our own;
We shall be free—we shall be free!
Our fathers’ rights shall our standard be!’

Meanwhile, Puxleigh laughed till tears came into his eyes, and had imbibed quite enough of wine to make him very frisky; so he was waltzing round the table and chanting somewhat incoherently of a certain ‘Mynheer van Dunk who never got drunk,’ and so forth, till Douglas arrested his course, and said, seeing that he was indulging in successive fits of laughter:

‘What the deuce *have* you been about, Puck?’

‘Only taking a little interest in the somnolent and marital arrangements of these Boers and Boeresses, and I don’t expect much thanks therefor in the morning.’

‘Why?’

‘Because gratitude forms no part of the Dutch character.

But let us turn in for the night—or what remains of it; and ere we do, I may perhaps be able to show you what I mean.'

And taking his sword and revolver with him Tommy led the way. As they passed to their own apartment, he informed Douglas that when he had left the table for a few minutes he had stolen into the room softly, when the Dutch ladies were asleep, and had on the chairs near the beds exchanged the bright blue dress of one for the flowing crimson of the other, acting on a hint given him by a famous old *cause célèbre*, once well known on the Continent. The door of the double-bedded room was ajar; the two friends peeped in, and by the night-light could see that the hat of Erasmus, with its ostrich feather, was placed on the blue dress of the vrouw of Van Bloom, which was disposed over the chair; and the hat of the latter, with its vulture's wing, lay beside the crimson dress of the wife of Erasmus. In short, as Puck had foreseen, misled by the colours and the changed position of the two costumes, each tipsy Boer was now snorting and snoring beside the equally unconscious wife of his friend!

'It is an enormous piece of fun!' said Tommy; 'how the mess would roar if they only knew of it,' he added, regarding the whole situation with intense satisfaction; but Douglas, while inclined to laugh at it, could not help regarding it gravely.

'Blood will come of this!' said he, as they softly withdrew. 'These fellows are disposed to be jealous enough of each other already; they are well armed, and will fight it out to-morrow.'

'Let them fight,' replied Tom Puxleigh, 'a few Boers more or less in the world won't matter; and if they shoot each other it will still leave a long balance of slaughter on the side of the poor 94th.'

When morning came, Douglas confidently expected to find the whole Heerenlogement roused by shrieks and the explosion of firearms; but he only heard the grinding of wheels upon ground, the tramping of oxen, and the vehement cracking of a *jambok*, or long whip for managing a team, and which is formed of a thong cut from the flexible skin of the hartebeest antelope.

'*Inspann and trek !*' shouted a voice loudly and impatiently, and it proved to be that of the Heer van Bloom.

Douglas looked from the window. How or when the mistakes of the night were discovered—mistakes which the two gentlemen attributed to their over-potations—neither he nor the gleeful Puxleigh were ever to know ; but he could see the two Boers standing apart, smoking in sulky silence, eyeing each other most probably with suspicion and hostility, though their *vrouws* were laughing at them both, neither of them knowing what to make of the matter, or how it had occurred, and being slow of comprehension, how the dresses had been substituted, and how it all came about ; for if they were undoubtedly tipsy, their wives were undoubtedly not. But whatever they thought, or whatever they suspected, they were eventually to have a terrible revenge. As Douglas and Puxleigh wished to rest their horses, which were rather cut up by a nearly seventy miles ride over very rough roads from Durban, they resolved not to start until after mid-day, and ere that time some rather objectionable visitors arrived at the establishment of Jan van Beer.

When mid-day came, and the bell of the Dutch church of Windvogel tolled the hour of one, Puxleigh found that as his despatches were urgent, he would be compelled to depart alone without Douglas, whose horse was not yet fit for the road ; thus, with intense regret, they separated, the latter hoping he might overtake the former at some point between Windvogel and the actual front ; and while watching his departure and disappearance along the road that led to Lidgetton, three Boers came somewhat noisily and with a swaggering air into the kitchen of the Heerenlogement. They eyed Douglas with undisguised hostility, and were rough, brutal-looking fellows : their faces were not unlike those of the Boers we may see in the pictures of Adrian van Ostade. Yet they were, as Jan van Beer said, Dutch *Africanders* with a dash of Griqua blood in them. Save long knives in their belts, they seemed to have no arms ; but were evidently 'going to the front,' and intent on mischief.

In costume they were nearly the same as Van Bloom and his friend, only that they were considerably tattered and seemed to be trek boers, or nomad farmers, who had no fixed place of abode ; but eventually they proved to be mere robbers, if not worse. They ordered bread and cheese, a bottle of Cape smoke, and jugs of beer, imperiously and noisily, while seating themselves at a table and swearing in Dutch at the Kaffir waiter, and more particularly at the old red coat he wore. Their bearing roused the ire of Douglas, but he was alone, and felt himself single-handed. From the time the *Upnor Castle* had sailed from Woolwich he and his new friend, Tom Puxleigh, had been constant companions, and he missed his society sorely now, and was most anxious to rejoin him ; thus he had visited his horse again and again, feeling his muscles and withers, in his impatience to be gone, and now he began to fear that too probably another night must elapse ere he could take to the road.

He saw that the girl Gertrude, whose family waggon had not arrived for her, regarded the three new arrivals with alarm, and shrinking from them, had sought the seclusion of her own room ; and he, fearing that they might become offensive to himself and provoke a brawl, went to smoke a cigar in the inn yard, where, for a time, the landlord joined him with his meerschaum.

‘Do you know anything of those fellows who were making such a noise just now?’ asked Douglas.

‘Too much, mynheer,’ replied Jan.

‘They seem to be *trek boers*.’

‘They were—but latterly they have been *tronkvolk*.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘Criminals discharged from Durban jail. They are three brothers—Hans, Dyrk, and Pieter Swartboy, and three greater rascals are not to be found in Cape Colony. I have no doubt they are on their way to join the insurgents, beyond the Drakensberg.’

On revisiting the kitchen, the landlord found that two of the fellows referred to had gone off without paying for what they

had obtained from him, and had, moreover, taken away a handsome silver-mounted jug.

'Hans put it in his pocket,' said Dyrk, who sat at the table still drinking and quietly smoking.

'*Der teufel hole dich !*' exclaimed the landlord, as he dashed the ashes from his meerschaum, and, hastening out on the roadway, overtook the two Boers at some distance from the village. 'Hilloa,' he cried, 'stop, you have forgotten to pay for your wine and beer.'

'Of course we did,' replied Hans, laughing.

'You did not forget to take away my handsome jug, and that I will have back at all hazards, you *henckers knecht* !'

'I am no more a *henckers knecht* than yourself,' replied Hans. 'Pieter, give him his jug.'

Pieter grinned ; put a hand into the capacious side pocket of his leather 'crackers,' but instead of producing the jug, drew forth a cocked revolver, which he held at the head of Jan van Beer, while Hans eased him of his watch and all the money he had on his person, after which they rushed into a thicket by the wayside and disappeared.

Hurrying back in great wrath to his house, he was alarmed by the screams of women and the double report of pistols, after which Dyrk Swartboy came rushing forth with his face smeared with blood, and, rushing along the road like a hunted hare, vanished into the thicket as his brothers had done.

It turned out that the moment he had left the house Dyrk had forced open the till, pocketed the contents thereof, and assaulting the girl Gertrude, was about to tear away her earrings and other ornaments, when her cries brought Douglas to her assistance. Drawing a revolver, with an oath Swartboy fired straight at the head of Douglas, who was not slow in replying, and shot away a portion of his assailant's right ear. The latter fired a second shot, but in his haste and confusion missed a second time, and then took to flight, after which Douglas turned his attention to the girl, whose terror was so great that some time elapsed ere he could soothe her into calmness,

‘Three God-lost looking schelms, if ever there was one !’ groaned Jan van Beer, whose losses, on the whole, were not small ; but he was drawn from the contemplation of these for a time by the arrival of a waggon, drawn by two oxen, in care of a half-Kaffir driver, to convey Gertrude to her father’s house, some twenty miles off or so ; and prettily thanking Douglas for the protection he had afforded her, and blushing the while, as he handed her into the travelling conveyance, as politely as if he had been squiring a lady to a handsome carriage in Park Lane ; then crack went the jambok, and the creaking waggon departed with its pretty freight.

Douglas watched for a time along the road that wound away by Lidgetton, till it finally disappeared among the woods ; but that was not the last he was to see of Gertrude van Damberger.

Next day found Douglas’s horse still unfit for service, and in his impatience to be gone, he was beginning to think of procuring another somehow, when one of the Natal mounted police arrived, carrying papers of importance for the front, but whom a sudden attack of illness incapacitated from proceeding further than the Heerenlogement. Douglas arranged to exchange horses with this man until they should meet again, and leaving his valise to be sent on with that of Puxleigh by waggon, he bade adieu to the inn, and rode off.

‘Look out well on the road, mynheer,’ was the last warning of his host ; ‘these three precious henckers knechts are no doubt on the watch for you somewhere, and Dyrk will have blood for blood !’

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE LANG KLOOF.

DOUGLAS either forgot or cared little for the warning of Jan van Beer, and felt his spirits rise as he rode on in the clear breezy atmosphere of the evening, with a good horse under him, and the hope of erelong rejoining his only friend in that part of the world, Tom Puxleigh ; of seeing some actual fighting, and being amid those stirring scenes in which he expected

to forget, for a time at least, the thoughts that had long oppressed him ere he quitted London, as he believed, for ever.

His progress was very slow, however. The road he had to pursue was stony, and crossed incessantly by spruits or streams; though in one place he had to traverse heavy sand, where not a drop of water was to be found.

Towards sunset he halted by a brook, to water his horse and let it nibble the grass or feed on the mealies or Indian corn.

There was a grave-like stillness, a solemn hush in everything around him, and his thoughts were then in unison with it. The country was rocky and mountainous; rather barren too, or abounding only in thick brushwood and those succulent dwarf trees called by the colonists speck-boom. An ostrich appeared for a minute striding along the summit of a cliff, in strong outline against the sky; a solitary vulture was soaring overhead; and when they disappeared no other living thing was seen in that solitude, where even insect life seemed to have departed.

Douglas looked to his girths and stirrups, remounted, and set forth in what he supposed to be the right way, but slowly, for he was sunk in thought, and disposed to resign himself to that mood of mind suggested by the dying light of eve and the solemn nature of the silent objects around him.

‘His eyes were with his heart, and that was far away.’ At length the bridle fell from his hand on the neck of his horse, and it was only when the latter, a well-trained charger, roused by the apparent stupor of its rider, came absolutely to a standstill, that Douglas became aware of the nature of his situation, and touched it with the spur. Ignorant of the locality, he often reined in his horse, and had to deliberate with himself as to which path he should pursue; and once on inquiring of two Boers whom he passed, he was assured that he had received the right direction from one, by hearing the other say:

‘Why did you tell him correctly?’

‘What does it matter?’ was the reply; ‘one more or less is nothing.’

'True; in a few weeks we shall shoot the country clear of these English wretches; thanks to Onkle Paul.'

By this he knew they referred to Kruger, the rebel leader, and they spoke in Dutch, thinking he would not understand them.

These men were going north, and to Douglas it had become apparent that most of the Boers he saw were proceeding in that direction, towards the Drakensberg, the mountain range which separates Natal from the Transvaal. In a deep and narrow way, known as the Lang Kloof (*i.e.*, long pass), from which the sunlight had long since faded, soon after this he saw an armed Boer take his stand, with the air of a man decidedly prepared for defiance and hostility. In addition to a rifle, on which he leaned, he had a revolver and long dagger-knife in his leathern girdle or belt, which was prepared with piping for cartridges. He stood fairly in the centre of the path, and caused Douglas's horse to become restive, and to rear with alarm.

'Stand aside, please,' said the rider; 'don't you see, fellow, that you are scaring my horse.'

'More than your horse may be scared yet! Perhaps you expect to pass without paying toll?' said the other, whose face seemed to be familiar to Douglas: for, indeed, this man—he of the huge and untrimmed beard—was no other than the Trek Boer, Hans Swartboy, and Douglas little thought while this parley took place in the narrow way that the rifle barrels of Dyrk and Pieter were covering him with deadly aim, as these worthies lurked among the speck-boom by the wayside.

'What the deuce do you mean by toll, fellow?' asked Douglas haughtily, placing a hand on the case in which his revolver hung.

Hans seemed nothing daunted, but rather disposed to amuse himself with 'the Englander,' whose fate he knew to be sealed, but with whom he thought to play as a cat would with a dying mouse. His massive and stolid face wore an expression of composed indifference—almost contempt, though his eyes at times glared with hate and avarice—hate of Douglas as a Queen's soldier, and a desire to possess all he had, even to the clothes he wore, if they could be got untarnished by blood.

'For what must I pay toll? and who the devil are you that demand it?'

'I can ask questions better than answer them,' replied Hans, laughing, and expecting every moment to see the rifles of the lurkers flash out of the brushwood, especially as Dyrk was maddened by the smarting of his wounded ear. 'What brings you here, stranger?'

'On British soil—in the colony of Natal?'

'In the colony of Natal, and on your way to the Drakensberg—yes?'

'Stand aside, you scoundrel, or——'

'Or *what*?' interrupted Hans bluntly and insolently. 'You mistake your man if you think to quell me, and if you adopt this tone our parley will be as short as your life.'

Douglas, infuriated by the tone thus adopted towards him by a common thief and avowed rebel, laid his hand on his sword; but at that moment two rifles flashed out redly from amid the speck-boom; he felt his horse quiver under him, and heard it snort, almost cry, as if with terror and pain. One ball had deeply scored its right flank, while another had inflicted a long and fatal wound in its body near the girths, and it bounded wildly away, hurling to the earth Hans, who was in the act of cocking his rifle.

Then, like lightning, it went up the long, narrow, and rocky ravine, leaving the three assailants far behind it in a few minutes.

A couple of rifle shots whistled past Douglas, but in an incredibly short space he was safe from further peril. His maddened horse had now got the bit between its teeth, and thus, though an able and skilful rider, he had lost all control over its actions.

He had not even the power of guiding it, as it rushed madly, wildly on, he knew not where, or in what direction. His heart beat highly, and with just rage, at the whole episode. He could but hope that when the animal in its furious career had dashed Hans Swartboy to the earth, some of the bones of that personage were injured beyond repair. The country seemed wild, un-

trodden and uncultivated on every side. There were few villages in that quarter, and there are fewer still in the Transvaal—only vast Boer farms far apart. He could see every object clearly, for now the full moon was in her cloudless beauty, and rendered the night nearly as bright as day by the flood of her silver splendour. The speed of his horse began to grow less and less; its action grew laboured and uncertain; it stumbled forward frequently and heavily, and would more than once have fallen on its head had he not promptly kept it up by bridle and spur. After a time it seemed totally incapable of proceeding further, and sunk so slowly under him to the ground that he had no trouble in disengaging himself from the stirrups and saddle. Its right flank was drenched with blood, of which it must have lost vast quantities, leaving a regular *spoor* or trail behind; its mouth and velvety nostrils were a mass of froth and bloody foam; its bowels were protruding through the long gash made by the tearing passage of the bullet across its stomach; and it was evident that the poor animal would soon die. To do anything—except shoot it—was beyond the power of Douglas; and he could not even do that, as, to his dismay, he had lost his revolver, the strap which secured it to his waist-belt having, unknown to him, given way! He felt that soon he must shift for himself, find shelter, if possible, for the night, and a guide for the morrow; but, while proceeding afoot by the path, which still threaded the narrow kloof, on each side of which the hills towered high in the moonlight, he came suddenly upon an animal of a kind he had never seen before. It was above eight feet in length, and large as a horse, which it somewhat resembled, while it possessed some of the characteristics of the buffalo and antelope. Its body was brown, with a stiff erect black and white mane. It had a horse's flowing tail, and cloven hoofs. Bristling hair four inches long covered its face, and a mass of it grew from the underlip to the throat, and it was furnished with two enormous and dangerous ram-like horns, sharply pointed and projecting forward. It was, in fact—though Douglas knew

it not—a gnoo or niou, the wild beast of the Hottentots, which inhabits the mountain ranges to the north of the Cape of Good Hope, where it is rather rare now. It was quietly grazing when he came suddenly upon it, and stopped, irresolute whether to advance or retire, as he knew nothing of its nature or propensities, while, to his eyes, it seemed alike monstrous and remarkable. The gnoo raised its formidable head and regarded him steadily. It then began to caper about, lashing its flanks with its long switch tail, and tearing up the ground with its hoofs, as if violently excited; and Douglas, now more than ever regretting the loss of his revolver, conceiving, not unnaturally, that it was about to rush upon him, and gore him to death with its enormous horns, hurled at it two large stones, which struck it with severity; and as these animals, when wounded, have often proved dangerous even to the armed huntsman, he brought about the very catastrophe he sought to evade. It charged him with fury, and thus he was compelled to retreat up the side of the kloof, pursued by the gnoo!

‘By Jove!’ thought he, ‘the adventures of the night seem not to have ended yet—to be only beginning, rather!’

Followed by the infuriated animal, he proceeded up a rift or chasm in the rocks, till he found that it ended in a sheer precipice, the height of which he could not determine, though clumps of trees and the lighted windows of a house could be seen at some distance below; but he had no time to think or calculate, as his enemy was close upon him.

Douglas chafed in spirit at the whole affair. There was something grotesque, absurd, and exasperating in the danger which menaced him, and yet it was great—in front as well as in rear. Before him was a precipice, and behind a savage and remarkable looking brute, of a kind he had never seen before, even in a zoological collection.

If he had possessed a gun, or even his revolver, the matter would soon have come to a conclusion, but neither party had now the power of retreating, for the fissure in the rocks was so

narrow that the gnoo had neither power nor space to turn, if inclined to do so, and Douglas felt certain that if he looked round to discover a chance or mode of retreat, the animal, which had paused in its charge, would rush upon him at once with its deadly horns, and gore or throw him over the cliff.

For a few minutes they stood perfectly still, regarding each other as if mutually puzzled.

At length the gnoo began again to lash his flanks with his huge switch tail, to paw the rocks, and lower his shining horns as stags do when at bay, and preparing for a rush at the hounds. Douglas breathed short and hard; he felt conscious that a catastrophe was at hand, and, drawing his sword, stood with it shortened in his right hand, which grasped the blade about the middle thereof, and, rushing on the gnoo, he seized one horn with the left, and plunged the weapon with all his strength into its throat; but at the same instant the gnoo bounded headlong over the precipice, carrying Douglas with him, and both fell headlong down some sixty feet or more, and as he fell a shout of dismay escaped him.

Douglas was above, the gnoo beneath, thus his fall upon the stones and soil beneath was broken; but he became senseless, and, for a time, remembered no more, and all unknown to him, there hovered over him impatiently the *oricon*, the largest of African vultures, while uttering its shriek from the rocks, was a great Kaffir eagle, sitting on a pinnacle, flapping its dusky wings.

Fortunately for him there were no hyænas—the wolves of Africa—in that quarter, or they would soon have scented the torrent of blood which gushed from the throat of the gnoo.

When consciousness came back slowly to Douglas he found the animal in the last throes of death. He had only power to repossess himself of his sword, which fortunately was uninjured, when he sank back feebly, as a stupor stole over him again.

But as he lay there in the brilliant moonlight, voices reached his ear, proving that either his fall had been seen or his cry had been heard by the inmates of the house referred to, and the latter turned out to be the case eventually.

He heard a heavy curse uttered in Dutch, and then another voice, which seemed like one he had heard before, said : 'Hush, Enoch ; curses come home to roost, if chickens do not.'

'He is one of the Englishers,' growled the first speaker, 'and they are worse than *da springhaans* !' he added, referring to the locusts, which are the curse of the Cape, as they eat up the crops and leave neither leaf nor stalk behind them.

'He is dead,' said another, giving Douglas a rough push with his foot. 'Let us throw him into the swamp, and leave him there to fatten the oricons. The flesh of an Englander is better for that than even mealies can be. Their corpses should be consumed with fire,' he added, with that scriptural phraseology to which even the more ferocious Boers are so prone, 'with a fire like that of Gehenna, which consumed the offal of Jerusalem, and eaten with worms, as the unburied on a battlefield.'

'*Ver van huis, dicht by zijn schade*' (far from home is near to harm), said a woman's voice softly ; 'and, oh, heavens, father,' she added, 'it is he who befriended me—who saved me from the robbers at the house of Jan van Beer !'

'Do you say so, my girl ? Truey, Truey, are you sure ?'

'Beyond all doubt,' replied the girl Gertrude—for it was she who spoke—and kneeling down by Douglas, strove to raise him. His helmet had fallen off, and as she picked it up, woman-like, she saw what a handsome head and face, careless, bold and noble, the sufferer had.

'Ach Gott, Truey, then this alters the matter. If he so befriended thee we cannot do less than befriend him,' exclaimed her father, a great fat Boer, with an enormous round broad-brimmed hat, and from whose heavy-moustached lip there projected a huge pipe, with a great head, black and polished by long use, for, like all Boers, the Heer Hendrick van Damberger was a prodigious smoker, and as Douglas now strove to rise, he held forth a strong and ample hand in size to assist him.

At length he stood erect, propping himself upon his sword. No bones had been broken, but he was terribly shaken by the fall,

and trembled in every limb while almost inarticulately relating what had taken place, and how he came to be lying there, beside the now dead gnoo.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LUST EN RUST.

DOUGLAS was at once conveyed into the house, close by, and offered coffee, the first thing a Boer does when he means to be civil, and it was served up to him by the pretty hands of Gertrude, as he sat in her father's large leather-covered elbow-chair, which was resigned for his use.

The Heer van Damberger did not prove ungrateful to Douglas, who remained for several days at his kraal or farmhouse *Lust en Rust* (or Peace and Pleasure) as he named it, to recover his strength, and to procure a horse, and from which he had eventually to take his departure a little quicker than he came. The Heer was a Boer, yet master of German and English, and farmed some fourteen thousand acres of land; and at one time he had been a Landroost or Magistrate. 'The Boers,' says a recent writer, 'do not send their children to school; large families live in two-roomed houses—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters sleeping in one chamber; they never wash, and wear their clothes night and day without changing them; they will live upon the carcasses of wild beasts and blesboks, so as to reduce their expenditure to a minimum.' He adds that the big Boers are dirty, and the little Boers are dirty too; they are averse to neighbours and to all change; but it is to those of the Transvaal he chiefly refers—the pleasant people we were so anxious to coerce into being fellow-subjects under the British Crown; but the household of the Heer van Damberger in Natal was of a different kind, and was so thoroughly old Dutch that it might have stood on the banks of the Maese, or within a mile of Amsterdam.

As the house of a Dutch Boer in Cape Colony never has an upper story, it was all built on the ground floor of well-

tempered clay, the outer walls being whitewashed. There was no ceiling, the interior being open to the roof—spacious, full of shadow and shadowy uncertainties, like those old interiors of the old Dutch pictures of Teniers, Van Tol, and others. Hams, baskets, strings of onions, implements, guns, hunting apparatus, game and dried flesh of various kinds depended from its dusty rafters. There was also a species of hall occupied by the family, which consisted only of the Heer, his son and daughter Gertrude, with Enoch Heemskirk, her *fiancé*, a sullen and loutish-like fellow, whose bearing towards Douglas was the reverse of courteous or pleasing, as his sympathies were all with his countrymen beyond the Drakenberg mountains; and as he generally preferred Skiedam and Cape smoke to the wine with lemon-juice and sugar in it, which Gertrude always prepared in a huge antique Utrecht bottle for her father, his temper, like his nose, was somewhat inflamed. How a girl so pretty and attractive tolerated such an admirer can only be explained by the fact that lovers were few and far between in that part of Her Majesty's dominions. How remote and far off seemed the past life of Douglas, when he regarded with a wondering eye his present surroundings! Was he the same sorrowing son who had laid his mother in her grave at San Lorenzo in Rome, who had led a life of struggle and wandering, and who, relinquishing his barren title, had drudged for a pittance at the desk for Sir Jahleel Jermyn, and had loved and lost the soft-eyed Violet?

Thinking of the past, and longing to be gone, he would sit dreamily in the dining-hall of Hendrik van Damberger, with Gertrude knitting or sewing by his side, while her father and lover were riding far afield, looking after the herds and flocks.

In one of the many open cupboards were a few volumes, but they were only Dutch Bibles, and prayer-books in the same euphonious language. The furniture consisted of two solid wooden tables, with settees on the earthen floor; an old clock that might have ticked a hundred years ago at the Bompjees of Rotterdam, and a lot of blue Delft ware; yet the Dutch Boers hate Holland and the Hollanders,

Behind the sitting-room was the kitchen—the true realm of the Dutch Boeress. And there, as Douglas looked, sat an old woman peeling turnips who might have served for the model of Nicholas Maes' picture in the National Gallery. On the other side the windows opened to a garden enclosed by quince hedges, where the tulips were usually in full bloom ; where the Heer was wont to enjoy his pipe and beer in a pretty little *zomerhuis*, and where two Bechuanas, or half-bred Hottentots, were at work with the same amount of clothing that Adam might have worn in Eden.

And from gazing dreamily and wonderingly on features and objects so strange, Douglas would be drawn to the more immediate present, by the plump, blooming Gertrude, or Truey, as she was called, prattling away in Dutch of the little world in which her secluded life was cast, or asking Douglas of his native land and other places where he had been—of scenes, of sights and places of which she could not have the slightest conception.

Her father and Enoch's conversation was all of arrowroot, ginger, turmeric, peas, beans, potatoes, and cucumbers, as reliable crops ; and how barley, pulse, and oats only thrive on the coast farms—dull subjects, at best, to a young girl, and over the monotony of which poor Gertrude had often sighed in secret ; yet to her any other kind of life was unknown ; and the greatest periodical event in hers was the then monthly *Nacht maal*, or celebration of Communion—the immense distance of farms from each other rendering regular attendance at the church impossible ; and on these occasions—celebrated as they were with an extreme kind of Presbyterian severity—a gloom, partaking of much of the moroseness of the English Puritans and old Scottish Covenanters—the most active in expounding and the most earnest in prayer (to all appearance, at least) was her sour, fanatical, and boorish lover, Enoch Heemskirk. The latter and the Heer were far afield. Douglas had partaken of his evening cup of coffee. Gertrude had given him a pipe, and poured the remains of the cream into a saucer for her

favourite cat, which partook thereof with much purring and infinite satisfaction, and then stretched itself out on the tiled hearth, luxuriously, for a siesta. Douglas sat silently smoking, and once or twice the girl regarded him shyly, with an expression of interest and trouble in her eye, and then sank into reverie, for the parting words of her father grated on her memory.

'I shall leave you with him' (meaning Douglas), 'Truey,' said he, as he mounted, 'without sticking a pin in a candle; but believe me, the sooner he is out of this the better, even should he trot off and encamp in the *veldt*. And I am sure Enoch thinks so too.'

Though the words were spoken in banter, Gertrude blushed at hearing them; for it is a custom among the Dutch Boers, when a girl is left with a lover, to have a pin stuck in a lighted candle, and when the flame burns it down thereto, he must depart, though the process may be delayed by the judicious application of a little salt.

'Are you a soldier?' asked Gertrude, breaking the silence which oppressed her, for she dearly loved to talk.

'Well, in a manner of way, I am one,' said he, smiling. 'I am a kind of volunteer.'

'How?' asked Gertrude.

'I fight for my own hand,' replied Douglas, thinking perhaps of Hal of the Wynd.

'You have come to fight against the poor Boers of the Transvaal?'—'Yes.'

'Did your queen send you?'

'No; I came to please myself.'

'Why? Have they harmed you?'

'Personally—no.'

'Yet you have come all these miles over the sea to fight against them.'—'Yes.'

'Why, I ask again?'

Douglas hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

'Because they have been guilty of great treachery, and are in arms against the Queen.'

Then, as her Dutch sympathies were all with the insurgents, he skilfully changed the subject, and spoke to her of other things.

Gertrude, who had never concerned herself about more than her hens, her tulips, and her knitting, her Sunday ear-rings for the kirk, or more than the movements of her lumbering lover, Enoch Heemskirk, had now a new occasion for thought in studying Douglas and listening to all he said, for he was so totally unlike any other man she had seen before, or those to whom she was accustomed daily. Tall, dark, and noble, with a thoughtful and northern beauty of manly feature, his face had a kind of melancholy in its expression as of one on whom some heavy stroke of fate had fallen—a stroke against which a tranquil temperament and a haughty spirit had striven. There was more of this element in his bearing now, than when Violet Jermyn had read his character so closely, and felt from the first a secret interest in him and a great yearning towards him.

So Gertrude, with wonder and interest—with dilated eyes and red lips parted, while her fingers paused in their work, listened to all that Douglas had to tell her of other lands than Natal, and of cities to which Pietermaritzburg and Durban were but tiny kraals indeed; for nothing had ever gladdened her sight, poor girl, but the herds of cattle, wild or domestic, the teams of waggons passing from the Bushman Pass to Lidgetton, and the spoil of the chase, the blesboks and wildbeests that fell under the rifles of Enoch and her father. And he, whose modulated voice fell so pleasantly on her ear, had looked on all he described—French and Italian cities, all aglow with lights and flowers, gay with music, equipages and festivals; on summer *fêtes* in glorious gardens, or on stately rivers; on balls, where jewels flashed and beauty shone; on marble palaces by the lagunes of Venice, or hidden amid the myrtle and orange groves of Sicily; on Rome and its Colosseum, and St. Peter's dome of fire, and where every street was a stream of life and

glittering lamps ; and when he spoke of these things, we say, she listened in childish wonder at her own ignorance of this great world that lay beyond the Quathlamba Mountains. Her forehead flushed, and her gentle eyes were drooped almost in humiliation. In the quiet stillness of the spring evening she was waiting for her father, and listened dreamily to the voice of Douglas, expectant she knew not of what ; but certainly not of that which he meant to say, or the scowling Enoch Heemskirk would have liked her to hear.

Before her spread the garden, where the two Bechuanas were still at work ; in the distance, far away, rose the Cathkin Peak ; there were colour, light, variety, and exquisite beauty ; yet all was only monotony in their familiarity to her eyes, which preferred, shyly, to seek the face of Douglas, when his gaze was not turned to her. When the trampling of horses near the door announced the return of her father and *fiancé*, instead of flying forth to meet them, as once was her wont, she withdrew to the solitude of her own room.

This was altogether so unusual a circumstance that the Heer looked troubled, and Enoch, who saw a vacant chair near that of Douglas, became gloomy and suspicious.

The poor and sick in the adjacent kraals looked up to Gertrude, and loved and blessed her, and all who were in want or trouble came to her for aid and sympathy, and never failed to find both. Why was she so good and amiable, so silent, and even sad at times, now ? Why, because if the truth were known, when the eyes of Douglas rested on her, they betrayed neither tenderness nor admiration—only kindness, if even that, she thought ! She felt conscious that she was not beautiful in his sight ; and what woman does not wish to appear so in the sight of all men, especially in the sight of one who interests her, and whom she would wish to enthrall ? And poor Truey's tranquil life had been so uneventful, that the sudden sojourn of Douglas at the farm of 'Peace and Pleasure' was a gleam of great brilliance to her—a gleam, we are sorry to say, that cast

her ungainly lover, in his leathern 'crackers' and broad-bound hat, into utter shadow indeed ! With more perception than she thought he possessed, her father began to perceive this.

'Now listen to me, Truey,' said he sternly, yet curiously enough, not unkindly, or the fourth on fifth day of Douglas's visit.

'I am listening,' faltered Gertrude, confused by his manner, though he tenderly caressed her little hand between his own two great weather-beaten paws.

'Well, I want to talk to you,' said he slowly, between the two great puffs of his pipe. 'What do you think of the Heer Englander ?'

Truey crimsoned deeply, and her father's face darkened.

'I—father ?' she faltered.

'You ! You have eyes in your head, have you not ?'

'Yes.'—'And you think him handsome ?'

'I have not said so,' replied Gertrude, with downcast eyes, and feeling surprised at this mode of questioning her.

'But you *think* he is ?' persisted the Heer.

'Yes ; don't you also think so ?'

'And a nice fellow ?'—'Yes.'

'Ach Gott !' muttered the Heer, with a grimace, 'he is too much of a talker ; *veele woorden vullen geen sak !* (*i.e.* muckle crack fills nae sack) he added grimly ; 'the sooner he is away from here the better for you.'

'And the better for himself !' said Enoch, who was smoking, unseen by them, in a corner.

Gertrude trembled ; the implied accusation, and the whole episode, were a new and painful experience to her ; so she grew pale as a lily.

'I saw him kiss her hand,' said Enoch, 'on the night we brought him hither.'

'He did so because I was kind to him—to him who saved me,' said Gertrude, who, in her Boer experience, had been astounded by an act of such humility ; '*you* never did that, Enoch !' she added, as her father withdrew.

‘Had I not your cheek to kiss?’ said Enoch; ‘it is the courtesy of the Englander to your sex, I hope nothing more. But curse him, he is as the Dead Sea apple, and may have kissed your hand only to soil it! He must be taught that the kiss of the Kaffir eagle’s beak may kill the little singing bird.’

Gertrude coloured again, and looked imploringly at Enoch.

‘I have found the ways of this stranger pleasant—nothing more,’ said she; ‘you, Enoch, would make all life a solemn psalm of sacrifice, denial, and humility.’

He eyed her gloomily—even savagely, and muttered:

‘So—so already you reproach—you draw comparisons!’

‘Yes,’ said the girl, with a little irritation.

‘Ach Gott! you wish to find favour in his sight. Remember,’ said he, grasping her plump white delicate arm till the marks of his coarse fingers remained on it, ‘that it is lovelier in the eye of heaven to be virtuous and plain, than to be handsome and without self-denial. What say the Scriptures?’

‘I know not, and care not. How dare you crush my poor arm thus?’ exclaimed Gertrude, as she flung herself away from him.

So Enoch was jealous! that meant mischief; so, as the Heer said, the sooner Douglas was gone the better for all.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TREK BOERS.

GERTRUDE was quite an heiress. Among the Dutch settlers in Cape Colony every child—even the babe just born—usually has an interest in the herd, a certain number of stock being marked at the time; and these, with all their future increase, are the property of the child. Thus the condition of the African Dutch Boer resembles to some extent the patriarchal life described in the Old Testament. But Gertrude van Damberger was the heiress of all the acres that spread around *Lust en Rust*, and of all the flocks and herds that grazed thereon.

Thus, rustic beauty apart, she was of no small interest and

value in the eyes of Enoch Heemskirk, who managed the Heer's estate, and who felt savage that her thoughts should wander even for one instant to another ; and he began to scheme revenge accordingly, though it was fully arranged by the Heer that Douglas was to depart on the following morning, and to this end gave him a horse and harness of moderate value in exchange for a bill payable at Durban ; but, as events proved, Douglas was fated to take departure long before dawn from the kraal of the Heer. The latter, having some business to transact at a distance, bade Douglas adieu, and departed for the night, leaving the house in the charge of the old vrouw, who acted as the keeper thereof, and of his future son-in-law, who at once thought about a scheme of vengeance, and, oddly enough, found the means therefor come to hand but too readily.

Completely recovered from the shake and shock of his fall from the rocks, there was no reason now why Douglas should linger any longer at *Lust en Rust*. For the last time that evening he seated himself at the board presided over by Gertrude to partake of the rather rough supper offered by a Dutch kraal—jerked or sun-dried beef, called in that land *biltongue*, and 'hominy' with 'mash and milk,' and manufactured by her skill out of the Indian corn. Abashed before Douglas and Enoch, after all that had been so recently said to her, Gertrude spoke to the former as seldom as possible, and to the latter very gently ; but whenever she did so he started, and replied absently, shortly or wearily, and with a certain oppressive effort, that was not unnoticed either by her or the more observant Douglas, who began to have a vague suspicion of something unpleasant. Enoch's face wore a crafty, feline, cowardly expression—one of much latent lust and cruelty, Douglas thought—and pitied the future of the girl with such a mate.

'You are going to the front—towards the Drakenberg—Truey tells me,' said Enoch.

'To the front—yes,' replied Douglas curtly.

'And yet you are not a soldier !'—'I am—what I am, now.'

'And what have you been ?' asked Enoch bluntly.

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing! That seems to be about the worst thing any one can be.’—‘Perhaps.’

So the style of conversation was not a genial one.

Enoch was more than usually silent, but he was thinking.

‘He has made her discontented with her home—petulant and longing to see the world—the world which no woman requires to see. Is it not written that “a female soul that chafes, longs and harbours discontent, is ever on the balance towards evil; for sin has already its surest forerunner and ally fastened on the life that is at war with itself.” Schelm! The plagues of Egypt on him! He has perhaps done more—made her discontented with *me*! Let him once begone, and I may alter that. There is no gourd so bitter that a little sugar will not put the taste out of it.’

Supper over, Gertrude discovered Enoch in the act of carefully loading a revolver with a very dark and determined expression of face indeed.

‘For what purpose is that?’ thought she, as her heart beat fast and painfully.

To his purpose she was not long in discovering a clue, for the old wrinkled vrouw who acted as cook and housekeeper drew her softly aside, and said to her in a whisper, with extreme agitation of voice and eye: ‘There are three *henckers knechts* too near us to be pleasant just now.’

‘Who?’

‘The three Swartboys—Hans, Dyrk, and Pieter—and they swear to have the life of the Englander ere morning.’

‘Where are they?’ asked Gertrude, in her agitation clutching the old woman’s hands.

‘In the great straw barn where the Indian corn is stored. There I overheard Enoch conspiring with them in secret to shoot him down as he rides through the Devil’s Kloof to-morrow; so, if we are to have the house saved from the curse of human blood, we must get him away betimes to-night.’

Gertrude's heart stood still ! A deadly trap was now set for the unfortunate stranger ! Would he escape ? Not without her aid, and she knew that to let Enoch know she had discovered his treachery and cruelty would not avert the catastrophe, but perhaps precipitate it. Oh that her father were at home ! was her first thought. But as he was absent she must act for herself.

She quickly found an opportunity of making Douglas aware that a snare was laid for him by the Trek Boers: Shame withheld all mention of Enoch's name, save in so far that she implored Douglas not to speak with him on the subject, but to be guided by her, and she might free him from peril, and being without firearms, he felt that he had no other course.

Yet his pride revolted against the necessity for stealing away from the house, like a culprit in the dark.

'You will think of me when you are gone ?' said she, in a low voice.

'Often, and always with gratitude,' replied Douglas.

Her face grew very sad and earnest, and her lips quivered a little. The barn in which the assassins lurked was on one side of the house ; the stables, where Douglas's recently-acquired horse was in stall, stood on the other side, and at some distance. He bade Enoch adieu as if about to retire for the night, and that worthy observed that on this occasion he did not, as usual, present his hand. Darkness had come down, and the moon was yet behind the mountains. Douglas took his sword, slipped softly out of the window of his room, and reached unseen, in shadow, the stables, where Gertrude, with ready, yet trembling hands, had his horse bridled, saddled, and well girthed up for him. As a Boer's daughter, she was quite familiar with such work, and now she and the stranger, who had so perilously interested her, were about to part for ever ! No word of tenderness—no word of more than the merest commonplace and politeness—had ever escaped him ; and though she would soon pass completely out of *his* life, it was doubtful if he would ever pass out of hers—out of *her* memory at least. His heart was now teeming with gratitude,

and words of warmest and earnest thanks were on his lip, but were arrested there, for ere he could utter them the starlight threw a shadow in at the stable door, and rifle in hand, Hans Swartboy stood before them ! A sound like a sob—a gasp of terror escaped Gertrude, and at the same moment the hands of Douglas were on the throat of the outlaw, for such Swartboy was. Douglas knew that if an alarm were given, he would be shot down without mercy by Dyrk and Pieter ; that all hope of escape would be gone ; and we have lately had ample proof of how prone to assassination and murderous outrage—even under flags of truce—the Dutch Boers have been, and will be. With a sudden and almost savage glow in his heart, as all the fire, indignation, and courage of his nature rose within him, Douglas hissed into the ear of Hans : ‘ Make a sound—utter a word—and you die ! ’

Clutching with both hands the muscular throat of the Boer, he swung him to and fro, as a terrier might a rat. Speechless, breathless, paralysed, by the suddenness of the attack, the strong ruffian yet strove to free himself, but in vain.

Rage and peril endowed Douglas with a strength beyond his own. He bent Hans, whose rifle fell from his grasp, downward and backward across his left knee till his face grew black and the gurgles of strangulation were heard in his throat ; then, and then only, he relinquished him, and tossed him on the ground with a spurn of wrath and contempt. Rage was a new sensation with Douglas ; but now his fury was blended with many memories long buried in his heart—pride of race and rank, disgust of an ignoble enemy, and the suddenness of the peril in which he found himself.

The moment, or nearly the moment, he was free, Hans grasped his knife, and was rushing on Douglas, when the latter passed his sword fairly through his body, and he fell heavily, choking, and in a heap as it were, among the litter of the stable.

On seeing the sudden flash of the sword, followed by a spout of blood as the blade was withdrawn, Gertrude, overcome, shocked by this—to her—most awful scene, uttered an irre-

pressible shriek, covered her eyes with her hands, and shrunk back from Douglas. With the latter, to kiss her cheek, sheath his sword, spring to the saddle, and be off, was the work of an instant. Not a moment too late either! From a window he heard the voice of Enoch shouting, while discharging his revolver: 'Betrayed—betrayed by the devil's horns!'

With murderous intent, he fired the six chambers, but as we all know that the least deflection in the aim of these clumsy weapons will make the bullets miss the object, even at the closest quarters, he spent his ammunition in vain.

Just as Douglas made his horse, by a flying leap, clear the gate of the farmyard, Dyrk and Pieter came rushing from their corn-barn, rifle in hand, while the whole household of the Heer van Damberger, even to the dogs, was roused by the alarm.

A few shots were fired after him at random, but even though the moon was up now Douglas was safe, though galloping, he knew not in what direction, along a rough highway bordered by quince hedges in some places, by clumps of wild lemon and thornwood in others, his heart tingling the while with mingled indignation, triumph, and gratitude—triumph that he had again baffled these scoundrels, and purest gratitude to the girl but for whom he might have had a miserable and obscure fate.

When he thought he had attained a sufficiently safe distance from the place he had left, he checked the speed of his horse and rode at leisure, and in hope that he might be in the right direction for Newcastle. In the brilliant moonlight he looked at the hilt of his sword and saw it obscured by the blood of Hans. It gave him no compunction. He only thought, in his just wrath, that he had 'fleshed' the blade somewhat ignobly, though in defence of his own life. Perhaps he had not killed the fellow after all—though the thrust was a deadly and a home one.

To Douglas it seemed as if the world had stood still, or that time had gone back to the old Scottish days of hosting and harrying—of feudal tulzies and fights with 'horse and spear'—to the time of that fierce Lord of Torthorwald and Carlyle,

who now lies under his lettered slab in the north aisle of Holyrood, done to death with sword and dagger in the High Street, when James VI. was King of the realm. And now he—his descendant—instead of being in his place in the Upper House, as a Peer of Scotland—was in that wild land, more than ever a Bohemian, a wanderer, ‘an adventurer,’ as Kate Jermyn had called him—on a level with the reckless spirits and broken-down lads—those failures in life—who, as a *dernier ressort*, manned the ranks of the Cape Mounted Rifles and Natal Carbineers. Times there were when he felt this galling and humiliating, and that he would rather be lying beside the first of his line in Holyrood, that luckless lord, whose tower of Torthorwald, with its roofless walls, its perilous stairs of crumbling steps, its halls and chambers, is now the abode of the owl, the bat, the hare, and the fuimart.

He might fall in action, without his name, even as plain Sholto Douglas, figuring in the *Gazette*, and if he did, who was there to regret him, except that waif and stray, his half-brother Cospatricks? In this land to which he had come, none would ever know that he was the last Lord of Torthorwald, unless it was through his old friend John Charters. What, then, would the Jermyns say? What the faithless Violet? For cruel, callous, and faithless he thought her.

It is a melancholy thing to observe, says Goethe, how often a notable man goes through life in a constant state of conflict with himself, his circumstances, and his time; without ever being so fortunate as to hit upon the (nevertheless simple) something by which *all* these might be reconciled; and Douglas was certainly one of these men as yet.

The dawn of day informed him, by the quarter from whence the light came, that he had been riding north, the very direction he wished to pursue; but he was travelling by a track that led through an utter solitude. When the sun came up in his glory, Douglas saw how fair the scene was to look upon as he reined up his horse on the crest of an eminence.

Huge and isolated masses of rock reared up their lofty heads at intervals; over them fell three snow-white cascades into a broad and limpid stream, in the bosom of which these rocks were reflected, with the foliage of stately trees of splendid growth that crowned them. There some large birds, not unlike cormorants, were searching for insects and flapping their wings; while, far down below, a scaly alligator was basking among the mangrove-trees, the flowering bushes and evergreens.

There, save the path that lay before him, the land seemed all unchanged since that Christmas Day in 1497, when the pious and valiant Portuguese, Vasco de Gama, with his three tiny caravels, first saw the shore, and in gratitude to God named it La Tierra de Natal, when, as Camoens tells us,

'Now dawned the morn when from the shining East
Three kings the holy cradled Babe address,
And hailed Him King of Heaven. *That festive day*
We dropped our anchors in the opening bay.'

How much had come and gone in the world since then!

As these disjointed ideas occurred to Douglas his spirit rose, and he rode on at a trot, and in thought built many a castle, baseless and aerial. He was yet too young to despond altogether, or be utterly indifferent as to the future; and thus at times there flashed up in his soul the high desire to do, even in his humble capacity, something great and gallant—something brilliant and noble—to be hewed out and won by the sword—something worthy of the Douglasses of the olden time—'the tender and true,' whose name and whose blood he inherited. Of these, at least, no misfortune could deprive him!

CHAPTER XLVI.

UNDER CANVAS.

WITHOUT further let or hindrance, Douglas—for so we shall still call him, and so he called himself—reached the little town

which is curiously named Newcastle ; we say curiously, as it is in a district abounding with coal. There he had delivered one of his letters of introduction to the officer commanding, and was promised, if such could be had, an appointment in the Pretoria Horse, or a similar irregular corps, and meantime the camp was to be his home. Around Newcastle, in many places, rose-tinted flowering grasses gave a strange bloom to the veldt, and to reach the barracks he had to cross the Icardu river. These edifices are merely houses built of mud, and Fort Amiel—so called from Colonel C. F. Amiel, of the 80th, a veteran of the Burmese war—on a hill, overlooks the little town, which consists of a Dutch church, a few scattered houses, one or two called hotels—one the *Plough*—and stores, where goods were sold at fabulous prices by greedy Dutch traders ; and the evening gun pealed out from the ramparts of the fort as Douglas took his way towards a few tents that formed the camp on the slope below it.

‘Welcome, old fellow!’ exclaimed Tom Puxleigh, as he dismounted at the tent of the latter. ‘You have been so long behind me, since we parted at Windvogel, that I thought you had come to grief.’

‘I very nearly did so, in more ways than one.’

‘Well, I shall hear all about it in time—but meanwhile, come into my tent and have a drink, while my groom looks to your horse. A regular Cape screw! What mouths these brutes have—hard as the trunk of a tree.’

‘I bought him from an old Boer, who was kind to me—the Heer van Damberger.’

‘D—n them all,’ said Tom Puxleigh, a little irreverently ; ‘we are, when here, within some twenty miles or so of their outposts on the Drakenberg range. What a lark that was we had at Windvogel with the two Boers and Boeresses! There is brandy—the Cape Madeira and dry sherry,’ he continued, placing the black bottles on a deal box which was placed close to the tent pole, and constituted a table. ‘Our regiment has

landed at Durban, is on the march up, and will, I expect, be here to-morrow night.'

'Is Honeywood with it?'

'No; Harry got a terrible fall when out with the Brighton harriers—came down a cropper among the South Downs, so he has been left behind on the sick-list; but Bramley and Tom Tandem are with it, of course. Now, welcome to three meals in one!'

'Three?'

'Tiffin, dinner and supper, *à la Boer*!' rattled on Tom, as his servant proceeded to lay the table with a rather diverse and peculiar set of appurtenances in the way of knives, forks, plates, and crystal, etc. 'You see, we cannot have all the luxury of the Royal Hotel at Durban, with its handsome Coolie girls as waitresses, with their bright costumes, naked feet, and wrists and ankles glittering with bangles. This,' he continued, as three officers in undress uniform came in, 'this is Douglas—friend of mine, who came out in the *Upnor Castle*—Umphreville, 58th; Udney, 60th Rifles; and Beddingfield, a gunner; you will all know each other well enough before we get through these bottles and that box of cigars.'

The friendly welcome accorded him, the free-and-easy—happy-go-lucky—mode of life, rather pleased Douglas, and he enjoyed to the full the half-rollicking, yet wholly gentlemanly and soldier-like bearing of his new friends, who had already been repeatedly in action with Zulus, Basutos, and lastly the Boers, and were well-bronzed and good-looking young fellows, the oldest not being more than five-and-twenty.

They knew not precisely what to make of him; but saw that he was bold yet gentle in bearing, and a thoroughly well-bred man; and as *he* looked at them, he thought it was hard to reflect that, after all a father's care, a mother's love and anxiety, from cradle to college days—the tenderness of home; after the hard work of training and cramming—of studying Chaucer, Spenser, and other equally useful requirements of the new and

disastrous system of examinations, these fine young English lads might be shot like dogs by the savage Boers, be buried in a ditch, or eaten by Cape vultures—perishing, and in the name of God and humanity for *what*? All three had been more or less wounded recently, but were recovering, anxious to go again to the front, and were merry as crickets. The evening sky was full of orange-tinted light in the west, blending into green rather than blue; and close to the tent door were the white star-like flowers of the giant jasmines, that grow wild in the bush, and the large blue convolvulus, hanging in festoons from tree to tree.

For chairs Puxleigh and his guests had camp-stools or bullock-trunks; and on the table, or box, was an *olla podrida* of a repast, tinned tongue, tinned lobster, beefsteak, ration bread, threepenny pineapples, and eggs, which were at more than a premium then, and scarcely to be had at all. But Tommy Puck had caught five fine hens, the property of a Boer, and after naming them after five ‘professional beauties,’ had doffed his patrol jacket, and, like a schoolboy romp, chased them indefatigably, till each in succession in its terror laid an egg—the first he secured being dropped by ‘the Belle of Jersey.’

The steaks of African beef, though pounded by Tom’s servant with an iron hammer before he cooked them, could scarcely be masticated.

‘Deuced tough!’ muttered Douglas.

‘Tough! I should think so,’ said the artillery lieutenant; ‘it has never been cold.’

‘How?’

‘It was on the trot when I shot the animal two hours ago. Pass the sherry.’

‘We shall have some mess fluids when the regiment comes in to-morrow,’ said Puxleigh; ‘do you know that Tom Tandem is riding in his saddle like a brick as he is, though he has been down with the Durban fever?’

‘A beastly illness,’ said the 58th man; ‘makes one’s skin red as a boiled lobster. You will find this a strange place after

Europe,' he added to Douglas; 'it has been said that in Africa there are streams without water, birds without song, flowers without perfume, and women without beauty.'

'Or clothing, you might add,' said Tom.

'As regards beauty,' responded Umphreville, 'I mean Kaffir women and Boeresses, of course; but, by Jove, I saw one English girl among the Red Cross nurses at Pietermaritzburg that might well turn the heads of the whole army.'

'Any news from the front to-night?' asked one, as the supper was cleared away, and brandy-pawnee and smoking became the order of the night.

'Oh, the old story,' replied Tom.

'And what is that,' asked Douglas.

'These brutes of Boers firing on our people while flying a flag of truce. They don't even respect the ambulance with the Geneva cross.'

'Anything more.'

'Colley will move out to-morrow, it is said, to meet the convoy, and two of the quarter-guard have been found tipsy on duty,' said Puxleigh.

'Tipsy—poisoned, no doubt, by that horrid Cape smoke, which is made, they say, out of paraffin, and would honeycomb the inside of a Gatling gun.'

Douglas and his new friends chatted and smoked far into the night ere they departed to their tents, as all were detailed for a convoy that was to start betimes on the morrow for the camp of General Sir George Colley at Laing's Nek. Puxleigh shared his tent with Douglas, and to the latter it was strange to lie awake and watch the stars and constellations coming out in succession in the sky, and know that not one of them would ever brighten over the distant land that was his home and the home of his forefathers. The fire-flies were darting about like red sparks; the eternal chirp of crickets was heard in the grass, as he tried to court sleep in his blanket-bag, while a great yellow moon gleamed straight into the tent, and the canvas wall of the

latter flapped in the wind, the monotony and nature of the sound suggesting to the dreamer ideas of a ship at sea in the lulls of a breeze. Then came darkness, and rain which rattled like dry peas on the sloping roof of the bell tent. Sleep was long a stranger to his eye, though the past day had been one of toil in the saddle, by kloof and spruit and mountain side, and his mind was full of busy thoughts. 'Lonely—in the world—are the men who are before their own time; but doubly isolated are the men who are *behind* it;' and Douglas, in many respects, was one of the latter. The rank he occupied, as a volunteer in this strange strife, was scarcely likely to fulfil the aspirations a false position, the result of poverty, and a strangled ambition had kindled in his heart, when love—as he thought—had died out of it.

'Well, well,' he thought, 'better soldier here in any fashion than break stones, a resort which Ouida terms "the general finish of honesty." I am the last branch of a withered tree, and should change the old Douglas motto of *Jamais arriére* to another—say, *Inesperata floriut*.'

'By Jove! the Kaffir rain-makers must be hard at work,' muttered Tom Puxleigh, referring to individuals who are the nearest approach to a priest in those lands; 'the rain is rattling down like buckshot on a drumhead!'

Then came a thunderstorm, with lightning that was alternately rosy red and mauve-coloured; and chill indeed was the hour before the bugles blew *reveillé* at 4 a.m., and the morning gun pealed from Fort Amiel over the vale of the Icandu river. But Douglas's first experience of being 'under canvas' was not unpleasant, though the atmosphere by day—the month being February, the rainy season—was not unlike that of a hot and steamy conservatory. Rain delayed alike the arrival of the Hussars, and the departure of the convoy till the subsequent day; but to Douglas the monotony of confinement to Puxleigh's tent was varied by intelligence that rather startled him, but the subject of which he would have kept entirely to himself, as it gave him occasion for thought and speculation, save that Puxleigh proved inquisitive.

Among some old papers and magazines sent out for the amusement of the hospital patients, he found a *Times* two months old that had come up country by the post cart.

'Ugh!' said Tom, as he tossed it aside after a brief perusal, 'two months old.'

'Well, it must contain much that is news to us here,' said Douglas, turning to it eagerly.

'To see who is dead, who born, who married, eh? To be sure, a London paper is a link here between us and the world we have left behind us—between Piccadilly and Potchefstroom—the Quadrant in Regent Street and the Quathlamba Mountains.'

Douglas made no reply; he *had* lighted on a paragraph that riveted his attention.

'SIR JAHLEEL JERMYN.—Nothing has yet transpired concerning the movements of this elderly gentleman and eminent banker, who disappeared in the City so mysteriously three days ago; and now strange rumours are afloat concerning another member of his family who has left home without any apparent reason therefor.'

Douglas read this over carefully three or four times.

'What do you see—what is up?' asked Tom Puxleigh, taking the cigar from his lips; 'is London swallowed up by an earthquake like Agram?'

Douglas gave him the paragraph.

'By Jove! old Jermyn—I remember his three girls at Brighton!' exclaimed Tom; 'a tip-top waltzer Violet was!'

'What can it mean?' said Douglas half to himself.

'Mean?' said Puxleigh, 'why, only that the old fellow has been like the City of Berlin.'

'Berlin—what do *you* mean?'

'On the Spree—on the spree—got run in somewhere and given a false address. His daughters were no end of nice girls—was spoony on one myself.'

'Which?'—'Violet.'

Douglas became very silent. A daughter of Sir Jahleel had

left her home, according to the paragraph. What daughter—which? Of Dolly's elopement and marriage with Vincent Sheldon he knew, the public did not; it was a thing of the past now. Was it Kate or Violet? The latter, of course, and the return of his ring was fully accounted for now; but with whom had *she* eloped?

'A curious family!' thought he; 'there was always a mystery about the purse-proud old man; and now he, also, has disappeared. Has his old friend, Joab Scrowle, aught to do with this?'

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BATTLE OF INGOGO.

THE town of Potchefstroom, in the Transvaal, a place with about two thousand white inhabitants, was now closely besieged by the Boers, and was doomed to fall unless relieved. It stands about one hundred and fifty miles from Newcastle, and is of some importance in that part of the world, having straggling streets a mile in length, hedges of roses, a Dutch church in the square, and smacks much of Holland in all its details.

The main force of the Boers was far to the southeastward of this at Laing's Nek in the mountains, after failing to carry their laager at which, Sir George Colley had now encamped on the further side of the Ingogo river, a tributary of the Buffalo, in the belief, it is supposed, that he would be able with his 'handful' of men to hold his ground there, and keep open his communications with Newcastle, and the great stores and depôts about Fort Amiel. The latter was garrisoned by one hundred and fifty convalescents—a force so small that they could do nothing towards opening the line of supply; and it was known that if the Boers, by working round Colley's post, could prevent relief of reinforcements, they might either attack the camp or march upon Newcastle itself, and seize our greatest arsenal in that quarter, so Douglas had come to the scene of immediate operations at a critical time for the General.

The latter's chance of holding his camp depended on his stock of provisions. Many expressed wonder that, with a force so slender, he should have advanced into a country so strong and mountainous; but no doubt this brave and unfortunate officer was inspired to do so by the belief, that his presence would draw there a considerable body of Boers, and thus relieve such garrisons as Potchefstroom and other places of immediate pressure. At daybreak on the 9th of February a convoy of forty waggons laden with stores and ammunition prepared to start from Newcastle for Colley's relief, and with this convoy Douglas and Tom Puxleigh volunteered to go, accompanying the escort—if such it could be called—a few men whose wounds were yet green.

'A cup of hot coffee with a dollop of condensed milk in it, and then hey for the road!' exclaimed Tom Puxleigh, as he and Douglas made a hasty toilette in the grey light of daybreak.

They were soon mounted, and while carefully charging their revolvers and selecting each a cigar, they watched with some interest the inspanning of the cattle to the forty waggons laden with the munition of war.

Some of these were old Dutch bullock waggons, drawn by as many as sixteen oxen, with a *forelooper* or Basuto Kaffir boy leading the foremost and driven by the *tottie*, or Hottentot Jehu, armed with a jambok or bamboo whip, the shaft of which is eighteen feet in length and every crack of which sounds like a pistol shot.

Unearthly were the yells and curses of these foreloopers and totties ere the whole teams of the convoy were got in motion, and lash after lash descended without mercy on the flanks of 'Deutschlander,' 'Schwartzmann,' 'Der Tuyvel,' or whatever the ox was named; most, of course, being bestowed upon any that was unlucky enough to be called 'Englander,' or 'Schottländer.'

Tiring of this, and aware that over such execrable roads as had to be traversed, the progress of the long convoy would be slow, Douglas and Puxleigh rode off together just as the silvery

mists rose from the vale of the Icardu and took the way towards the Ingogo River, ignorant that a strong force of Boers was advancing on one hand to intercept the waggons (of which they had sure tidings), and that Sir George Colley, on the other, had left his camp before Laing's Nek in order to escort them in safety.

As they rode on, from time to time, the two friends looked; yet saw no signs of the convoy on the way to the river; but supposing its progress to be slow, they rode leisurely on, all unaware that the waggons never left Newcastle, for the officer in command there, having heard that Boers were hovering on the route, resolved to wait till further reinforcements in the rear, such as the expected Hussars, came up.

Their own progress was slow, their horses only proceeding at a walk. The roads were simply tracks formed by the passage of the ponderous country waggons, and by these they had to proceed. Here and there by the wayside lay the skeleton of a dead ox that had sunk in the traces, and been speedily picked clean by a flock of vultures.

A half or wholly naked Kaffir would occasionally pass them at a slinging trot, with assegai and cowhide shield; and more than once in a cleft of the mountain they saw a native kraal or village, like a group of giant beehives.

'I certainly hear something like distant cannonading—is not that the boom of artillery?' exclaimed Douglas as a sound came faintly on the wind towards them, when they reined up under some mimosa-trees on an eminence, and from there had a grand view that spread from the heights behind Newcastle and all the plain between it and Utrecht, about twenty miles in extent, with the road, if it could be called so, winding in and out among the wild bush, and the horizon bounded by the usual flat-topped or headless hills of Africa, which all seem children of the Table Mountain.

'By Jove, there it is again! It *is* artillery!' said Tom Puxleigh, as the booming sound came down with the wind once more.

A flock of that kind of sheep peculiar to Cape Colony—flat-tailed, lob-eared, and without wool (strange to say)—were now seen rushing off as if in alarm down a kloof in the hills about half a mile off; and then above a ridge, something like a flag was seen flying in the wind.

‘The colours of the Dutch Transvaal Republic! We must be off or look sharp!’ exclaimed Tom Puxleigh; ‘let us dismount and keep under these trees *en perdue*.’

This had been barely done when a body of mounted Boers, in hot haste, with their rifles slung across their backs, swept at a gallop over a ridge to the westward, and soon after the sound of firing became distinct and continuous.

‘Old Colley is at it again!’ exclaimed Tom Puxleigh; ‘let us get on—we may come to a bad end if we are caught here alone.’

‘How?’ asked Douglas as he leaped on his horse, with flushed cheek and kindling eyes.

‘Like the babes in the wood, we might find our deaths here, and be covered up with nasty leaves by the dicky birds.’

Proceeding at a hard trot now, the valley of the Ingogo river opened before them, with willows in their first vernal freshness drooping over the water; long wavy and reed-like grass covered the sloping banks.

Every moment the din of the artillery grew louder, with the incessant crackle of rifle musketry.

‘I don’t know what the deuce has become of the convoy,’ said Tom Puxleigh; ‘but we must push on, and I, at least, must report myself to General Colley. He is either attacking, or being attacked, and we must take heed that we do not fall among the Boers.’

Mid-day was past now.

As they pushed on the booming of the cannon continued to reverberate along the vale of the Ingogo; then, occasionally, but far in the distance, an infantry bugle rang out, sounding the ‘advance.’ The enemy, now close at hand, were Dutch Boers—but sturdy, muscular, and reckless Boers,

ignoble, yet not to be despised enemies ; and high in the heart of Sholto Douglas flushed up the proud longing to do something worthy of his race—something brilliant and glorious in the sunshine of the world, or have his life stamped out—stamped out, unknown and nameless—but no ! he shrunk from the latter ; and at that time he felt himself to be the Lord Torthorwald or nothing !

It was the day of the terrible and disastrous combat of Ingogo.

Sir George Colley, hoping to keep his communications with Newcastle open, and fearing that the Boers might intercept the expected and much needed convoy of stores, had quitted his camp at eight o'clock that morning, with four pieces of cannon and only five hundred men of all arms, but chiefly of the 60th Rifles, and about twelve o'clock his advance was fired on by the Boers, who made a general attack, in great strength, and while flushed with triumph by their recent victory over the same troops at Laing's Neck.

On a grass-covered ridge beyond the Ingogo the Boers were posted in great security, lying flat among the long reeds, bushes, and stones, wherever they could find shelter, with their horses a quarter of a mile in their rear, hobbled or knee-haltered, as a means of rapid advance if victorious, or of as rapid flight if defeated.

On some commanding ground on the northern side of the Ingogo Sir George left two mountain guns, with a company of the 60th, to cover his retreat across the stream if he should have to fall back or be harassed by the Boers, and with the remainder of his slender force he bravely advanced towards the ridge above referred to on the other side.

There lurked the hardy Boers, men who could neither march, manœuvre, nor even form sections of 'fours' ; but who were resolute in heart, crafty and cruel in spirit, muscular in figure, and deadly marksmen ; who were accustomed to bring down the fleet springbok at full speed from their saddles, and to stalk all the great game with which Southern Africa abounds.

So closely did these trained sportsmen keep in their cover as

they lay flat on their stomachs, scarcely showing even a head, that our soldiers could only make out their whereabouts or in what direction to fire, by the puffs of smoke that spirted up with every deadly rifle-shot they sent among our troops in the open. Heavy was the fire of musketry from the opposing forces on all sides, the rapid discharge of the breech-loaders amounting at times to a literal roar; but from a plateau which they seized, our little force was driven down by Boers, without the true old British weapon—the bayonet—being once resorted to, as the contest was maintained at long ranges, generally seven hundred yards; and at times the Dutch, crawling from cover to cover, worked up near our position, till they were driven back by our shrapnell-shells and rifle-fire, and no doubt lost heavily, though much less than we did, by their knowledge of the ground and their great skill in availing themselves of every natural shelter.

At times the surface of the stream and its ridgy banks were almost enveloped in smoke, streaked by flashes of fire, and ‘human lives were lavished everywhere;’ the killed and wounded were strewing the ground fast, and the combat on the Ingogo from noon to dusk can only be described as being a rifle duel under cover.

The cannon from time to time took part in it, but so sure and deadly was the aiming of the Boers that ere long it became impossible to work them, for, being unsheltered by fascines or mantelets, the gunners were struck down the moment they stood up; and we are told that, with the exception of one lieutenant (who was wounded later in the day), every officer, gunner, driver and horse in the battery was hit shortly after the action began, and Sir George Colley lost the whole of his staff.

One gun was completely silenced for an hour, till some of the infantry began to work it, and so fast did those brave fellows fall that they had to be incessantly replaced, and the carriages were starred and whitened all over by bullet marks.

Times there were when the Boers worked their way to within two hundred yards of our position, and *still* a bayonet-charge

was impossible. Many of our wounded were hit again and fatally when crawling to better cover, and as many of the killed were hit in the head, their blood-splashed faces presented a ghastly spectacle, and here and there their white helmets, contrasting so strongly with their sombre-hued uniform, seemed to dot all the green slope. Such was the state of matters when, about two in the afternoon, Douglas and his companion came upon the terrible scene, and endeavoured by a detour to reach the rear of Colley's force unseen by the Boers, who lurked themselves unseen in every direction. Moving round the flank of a long thicket or natural belt of thornwood, amid which the cotton and castor-oil plants were growing wild, the companions were in expectation of reaching the General.

'Here are the mounted men coming up at a gallop in our rear!' exclaimed Douglas.

'Natal Horse Police, probably,' suggested Puxleigh.

'No—by heavens—look at their hats! They are two Boers hurrying on to join in the shindy, and their first instalment of it will be with us.'

He had scarcely said this when one unslung his rifle, at two hundred yards range, fired a shot which carried the gilt pike of Puxleigh's helmet clean away, and gave his head a very uncomfortable shake, or twist; but as this horseman did not reload, and the other kept his rifle slung, it was evident that they were without ammunition, a fortunate event for those they had so unexpectedly overtaken, and who now, sword in hand, rushed on them.

Powerfully built, brawny and roughly bearded fellows, clad in leathern suits, they wore the usual broad white hat, garnished with a feather, and cartridge belts round their waists, with knives and pistols slung thereat.

Ere they could be closed with, they resorted to the latter, and one wounded the horse of Puxleigh, who, by his revolver shot him through the head. The other sought to close with Douglas, in hope to use his long knife, but the latter, while

just having time to recognise in his assailant the canting and savage Enoch Heemskirk, by one terrible back-handed blow, delivered in a sweep from right to left, unhorsed him in an instant, and a yell of rage and terror escaped him as he fell.

The cut was sheer across his face, which was laid open, under the nose and through the centre of his thick, heavy moustache, disclosing all his teeth, and imparting to his countenance, as he lay senseless among the long grass, the aspect of having two mouths, the upper with a grin so horrible and ghastly that the infictor thereof bore it long in memory. His blood was too fairly up for it to affect him much then; he felt that he would have faced a hundred Boers had they come in his way. Moreover, he had only settled a score that was due with Enoch Heemskirk. Puxleigh looked rather pale as they rode on, flanking the thornwood thicket.

'Ugh,' said he. 'Douglas, I feel sick, by Jove.'

'Why?' said the other curtly.

'I never killed a human being before. But this, to be sure, was only a Boer.'

And now, by studying the direction and the sounds of the conflict, they contrived, without further peril or opposition, to attain the spot where the unfortunate General stood alone, without one of his staff, every officer of which had now been shot down—alone amid a very terrible and exciting scene of bloodshed, smoke, fire, and uproar—wounds, suffering, and death.

When the sun began to set behind the steep ridge of the Drakenberg range, the position of the slender and already half-annihilated British force was seen to be desperate. The livelong day our soldiers had toiled and fought without rations of any kind; a rough and difficult country lay between them and the camp they had quitted; and every moment the enemy were drawing nearer and nearer, under cover of the rocks, bushes, and long jungle-like grass, through which they crept like snakes unseen. The General looked at his watch. The hour was now 9 p.m., and darkness was fast closing in.

'Mr. Puxleigh,' said he, 'ride to the officer commanding the Rifles, and state that it is my order that the whole force is to fall back upon the river in our rear as quietly as possible. Mr. Douglas, please ride to the Artillery. The horses are to remain harnessed to the guns, so that all may retire from the position without the enemy discovering that any movement is in progress. Understand me, sir?'

'Perfectly,' replied Douglas; and he and Puxleigh departed each upon his errand, and little foreseeing all that was to pass ere they met again.

With the darkness that came on, the rain began to fall in torrents, and as the waters of the Ingogo rose fast, great difficulty was experienced in recrossing that river, while the Boers remained quietly on the watch, believing that the retreat of the British was impossible, and an easy capture of the whole would be certain at daybreak. All, save the wounded, and an ammunition waggon, every horse of which had been shot, crossed the stream safely, and fell back on the camp among the mountains.

Flattered by the fact of having had a piece of duty entrusted to him by the General, Douglas remained on the field to the last, rendering all the assistance he could. In the pitchy darkness, the scene around him was awful then! The sufferings of the wounded were great. A fierce cold wind swept down from the gorges of the Drakenberg; the rain continued to fall in torrents the livelong night, the cries for succour and water were heartrending; the wounded sucked and chewed their blankets in their misery, and the vivid flashes of lightning alone revealed, to a noble-minded medical officer, who remained toiling among them, where they lay, who were dying and who were dead. To the helpless it was a long night of agony and distress, and undeterred by the storm, the great vultures hovered in mid air impatient for their repast.

Finding that he could do no good by lingering there, Douglas followed the retreating force towards the river, but by the time

he reached its southern bank it seemed—at that part at least—to be in full flood, and with a current so great, that his horse would inevitably be swept away, and that both it and himself would perish ; so making a detour to the left, he rode slowly over ground of which he was totally ignorant. It was rough, broken, trackless, and where not covered with the karoo, a rich and aromatic herb of tiny size, was encumbered by dwarf timber and huge blocks of stone. Ever and anon he sought the bank of the river ; but still to cross was impossible ; and to linger where he was might throw him into the hands of the enemy ; and already stories were rife of their maltreatment of prisoners, or pistoling our wounded as they lay on the ground. By the events of that day, and others elsewhere, all our communications between Newcastle and Pietermaritzburg were utterly cut off !

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PAROLE OF HONOUR.

THE position of Douglas was now a lonely and perilous one. The flashes of lightning that brightened his face from time to time would have shown an observer, had there been one, that he was pale, yet resolute ; and his dark eyes looked straight and keenly into the unbroken gloom, though occasionally blinded by the hissing rain that came on the stormy wind.

So manifestly was the Ingogo swollen that it was useless to think of crossing it till at least daylight came ; and it was while attempting to do so on this ill-omened night that the unfortunate Lieutenant Wilkinson, when humanely hoping to succour the wounded, was swept away and drowned, with seven others, it was said. In some places, as the current tore past, it rent away the mangroves that drooped over it, and the branches of the trees groaned as they were torn and twisted by the wind. The great ridges of the Drakenberg were dark as a starless night could make them, and darker still were the deep and savage kloofs that yawned between. These granite heights, frequently called

the Quathlamba mountains, have such an altitude that the snow lies on them for several months of the year.

As for the rain, Douglas cared no more for it than if he had been a dun-deer in Athole woods ; but he felt a great anxiety lest he might fall into the hands of the enemy ; for, although reinforcements were coming up, the armed Boers swarmed over the whole country, and at that precise time the British military position in Natal was this : the forces were divided into three slender columns ; one was with Sir George Colley in his camp at Laing's Nek ; a second was somewhere between Ladysmith and Newcastle ; and a third between the former and Pietermaritzburg ; and between each of these a great force of Boers occupied strong ground.

To Douglas it seemed that he had been doomed to be a wandering horseman, a species of knight errant, since he had landed at Natal. His slender means were becoming exhausted, and, if not appointed to some local force, as he had hoped, his future was doubtful and desperate ; and his post with Sir Jahleel would seem ease and affluence by comparison.

Thus, he thought, was life of so much value that he should set store upon it ? Depression of spirit had naturally followed the high excitement of the day on the plateau of the Ingogo, and the results of it had added to that emotion ; but as the dawn drew near, it somewhat passed away, and he began to hope again that Fate might have something better in store for him than a narrow grave in South Africa, and so far away from all that remained of his inheritance now ; the old slab in the north aisle of Holyrood, which we have referred to before.

The rain had ceased ; the rays of the sun began to brighten the summits of the Drakenberg, and as the light came redly in, meeting the mist of the morning, it stole down the green slopes to the woods about their base. The rain-swept sky looked bright and cheery, but he was still on the enemy's side of the Ingogo, and it was still impassable, though he must have come to a point some ten miles westward of the field of battle.

He was in the act of looking cautiously about him when a rifle shot, fired from behind, made a silvery star on a granite boulder beside the stream ; a shout from many voices followed, and, on looking back, a party of some thirty mounted Boers came out of a thicket of thornwood, and galloped towards him.

The foaming river was in front ; they were behind, all deadly shots, and armed to the teeth ; and, as to resist, or attempt to escape them would have been madness, he could but draw his sword, and, taking it by the blade, present the hilt to the nearest Boer, in token of surrender.

It was accepted. He was then deprived of his revolver, and very plainly given to understand, in Dutch, that he was to consider himself a prisoner of war, but would be shot down at once if he attempted to escape. He bowed his assent, and was permitted to retain his horse, because the animal seemed very inferior to any that were ridden by his captors, among whom he discovered the Heer van Bloom and Erasmus, the two Boers whom he had met at the Heerenlogement of Windvogel.

They were not disposed to be unkind to him, and the former, seeing how sodden and weary he looked, gave him a very acceptable draught of genuine schiedam and water from the drinking bottle that hung at his girdle.

Erasmus was less sociable, and was an unpleasant-looking fellow. His cheek-bones were prominent ; his eyes dark, eager, and fierce in expression ; they glared from under his pent-house brows and the thatch of black hair that protruded from beneath the rim of his broad hat with the feather.

‘We shall never give in to you Englishers,’ he replied to some remark of Douglas’s ; ‘but mean to tell you, as the men of Haarlem told the Spaniards, that we shall never yield while we have one hand to eat and another to fight with. So said the Dutch of old ; and we, the Dutch of to-day, say the same. *Wat de ouden zingen, pipen de jongen.*’

Generally they betrayed no great exultation about their victory at Ingogo. Perhaps they were by nature and race too lymphatic.

'It rests not with superior valour, mynheer,' said Van Bloom; 'the hand of God is always with those who fight for the land He gave them.'

'There is *this* in it too,' said another, slapping the butt of his rifle with a hand hard as the hide of a rhinoceros; 'and fight we shall till not a Queen's soldier remains between this and the sea.'

'I shall be paroled, I hope,' said Douglas, to change the perilous tenor of the conversation.

'That will be according to the option of the Commandant Joubert,' replied Van Bloom; 'you will be most probably sent up country to Heidelberg.'

'And kept there till the war is over?'

'Yes.'

This was not encouraging, and as the party broke into a trot Douglas, of course, rode on with them in silence, and when a town, of which he knew not the name, came in sight, with the Dutch Transvaal colours flying over the house of the Landrost, some of his captors, who were less complaisant than Van Bloom, including Erasmus, began to sing their clumsily-worded, harsh, and guttural war-song:

'Our fathers' sweat, our fathers' blood,
Has soaked the ground on which they stood;
Our mothers' tears, our mothers' toil,
Have hallowed this, our Afric soil.'

They now entered the town. Its streets were broad, ill-defined, and irregular, consisting of one-storied houses, some built of a kind of stone which is easily wrought and hardens by exposure; others of brick, wattle, and mud. Brooks were purling everywhere, enforcing much leaping to those who were afoot, and holes were in plenty where the mud lay long after rain. There were spacious gardens, and everywhere weeping willows and rose-trees.

There was a Dutch Reformed Church, with the pastor's house beside it; and, as that evening the *Nachtmaal*, or Lord's Supper, was to be celebrated, the waggons and horses of country families were fast covering all the centre green; and among the

arrivals, who were all animated by much fanatic fervour, were some of those wild spirits who had come to seek for the gold of the Transvaal or diamonds in the fields of Griqualand ; some who perhaps came to scorn, yet remained to pray, in memory of the faces at home they might never see again.

The hubbub created by the arrival of the Boers with Douglas was increased by the appearance of another escort, with a prisoner on foot, and who proved to be no other than Puxleigh—poor Tommy Puck—who looked dejected indeed. The storm and rain of the past night, and the rough handling he had undergone among his captors, had somewhat damaged his costume and general appearance ; but his face brightened when he saw Douglas.

‘Beastly bad luck ours!’ he exclaimed ; ‘I little thought that you were in their hands. I crossed the river just as the artillery retired ; but was sent back with some orders about the wounded, was taken, and am here. How were you taken?’

Douglas related in a few words.

‘And now that these fellows have got us, what do they mean to do with us?’

‘A little time will show.’

A hoarse oath and exclamation caused Douglas to turn, and there, close by, among the escort of Puxleigh, stood Hans Swartboy, rifle in hand, and regarding him with a look of rage and menace ; so the rascal was not dead after all. But for Van Bloom and others, he would at once have assaulted Douglas ; then the name of the Commandant Joubert enforced order, and the furious and brutal Boer could but grind his strong white teeth in sheer rage, while under his weather-beaten skin the blood came and went rapidly. Douglas was now ordered to dismount, amid a crowd who were all agape to see what was to ensue, and he then became conscious that both Van Bloom and his friend Erasmus eyed poor Puxleigh with no friendly eyes. It would seem as if by some intuition, by a comparison of mutual notes or otherwise, they had some know-

ledge or suspicion of the practical joke he had played upon them at the inn of Jan van Beer, that they would take vengeance for it if they could, and to that end were now whispering ominously with Swartboy and some other Boers of very unprepossessing aspect. While these ideas were occurring to him, he found himself and comrade in the presence of the Commandant-General Joubert, with whose name the newspapers have made the public familiar.

Petrus Jacobus Joubert, the descendant of an old French Huguenot family, long settled in Southern Africa, had behaved during the war like a courteous as well as a brave enemy, and for years had been writing to our Ministry in the hope of averting it; and he was in London on the same subject, with Paul Kruger, in the July of 1880. It has been considered that he displayed undeniably good qualities as a military leader in his first repulse of Sir George Colley at Laing's Nek, in his second success at Schains Hoogte, and lastly at the storming of the Spitzkop. He received the two prisoners with politeness, and heard from Douglas the story of their capture. 'Of what country are you, mynheer?' said he, 'that you speak German with an accent so correct; and our Dutch nearly as well—an Englander?'

'No, a Schottlander.'

'Ah, I thought so. Well, it is all the same thing in the Transvaal, where neither one nor the other have any right to be.'

'But I am on the British side of the Drakenberg range.'

'True,' replied Joubert, smiling; 'and would fain be on the other side if you could. But your troops there are all hopelessly shut up by us in Potchefstroom and elsewhere.'

'You will, I hope, permit us to go back upon parole?' said Douglas.

'You are not an officer, I believe?' replied Joubert.

'No.'

'Then what are you? A special correspondent, who may commit to print all you see, and more you don't see.'

'No, mynheer.'

'What, then—a Bohemian—an artist—a wanderer—eh?'

'You are nearer the mark than you think,' replied Douglas. A wanderer, a Bohemian, homeless and nameless, apparently, he—Sholto, Lord Torthorwald—had a lineage of which these Dutch Boers knew nothing, or even how to respect or value it. 'I am one who has no name—no heritage—and yet I have both in away, that are second to none,' he said, with grave pride.

'This is an enigma to me,' replied Joubert.

'Whatever I am, I am at least a gentleman, a volunteer in this war, and hope you will accept my parole of honour.'

'A volunteer—came you here for land, or flocks, or gold?'

'For none of these.'

'A man who is above greed or gain is an anomaly in South Africa,' said Joubert grimly, 'and you belong to no regiment?'

'To none.'

'Then why are you here?' asked Joubert, with a lowering eye; 'I might hang you as a spy.'

'By the henckers' horns, hang him at once—*der tuyvils braden*,' said Hans Swartboy and one or two others.

'He is a friend of the General's—of this I assure you, Commandant,' said Puxleigh, in German; 'his parole is as good as mine.'

'A spy!' exclaimed Douglas sternly; 'I would have you to know, mynheer, that I come of a race that never knew falsehood or cowardice.'

'Well, well, I don't want to be encumbered by prisoners, and thereby lose men by escort duty,' said Joubert, after a pause and some consultation with a fat old fellow who proved to be the Landrost; 'you know, I presume, the nature of a parole?'

'Perfectly—I am a gentleman; a breach of it in European armies, and amongst civilized nations, has always been held as infamous as to fire upon a flag of truce. A person who has once been guilty of it has no right to be treated as an officer or gentleman, or to expect quarter should he again fall into the hands of the enemy.'

'Exactly,' said Joubert, whose brows had knit at the reference to a flag of truce ; but the bold free bearing of Douglas pleased him. The latter and Puxleigh accorded their paroles of honour that neither would serve against the Boers of the Transvaal if permitted 'without molestation' to return to headquarters ; and on this Joubert ordered their arms and horses to be restored to them, though much scowling and ominous muttering ensued among the crowd, where Van Bloom, Erasmus, and Hans Swartboy seemed in the mood to make mischief.

Joubert desired some refreshment to be given—coffee, of course, included—and ordered an escort to be detailed, with instructions to see the two paroled men in safety across the Ingogo river.

'Meanwhile, smoke and forget your troubles, mynheeren,' said the portly old Landrost, proffering his tobacco pouch amicably. 'The meerscham is our best comrade in all troubles.'

It is elsewhere stated that Van Bloom and Erasmus took a terrible revenge upon poor Tom Puxleigh ; thus it was with no small anxiety as to the result of the whole episode that Douglas, when he and the latter mounted to take their departure, after receiving their swords and pistols (and thanking the commandant Joubert for his courtesy), perceived the two married Boers among their escort, together with Hans Swartboy and one or two others who had made themselves prominently obnoxious at the house of the Landrost.

While receiving back their pistols on one hand they were required on the other to give up their ammunition.

'And now let us be off,' said Van Bloom, 'and I would every Englander was under promise to go, and fight here no more. It is written in letters of fire at Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg—written of you one and all—"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin !" Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting, and not only the Transvaal, but Cape Colony, shall be torn from thee !'

And with this puritanical cant in their ears they set out, with

their escort, some of whom were sour, Calvinistic, and also ferocious to a degree unknown elsewhere now; but the Heer van Bloom was a Boer who combined preaching and expounding with farming, and was noted for much sharp practice in pecuniary transactions, in which, like many 'Elders' in other Presbyterian countries, he did not always come forth with clean hands.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE BOER ESCORT.

ON the left of the mounted party the giant ridges of the Drakenberg, the boundary between Natal and the Orange State, and between Kaffirland and the Transvaal, towered high into the sky. The country seemed solitary and deserted—the farms far apart, and in one place Douglas and Puxleigh saw the remains of two extensive villages or native kraals, whence the people had departed, or where they had died out; though fragments of rude earthen vessels, of ostrich eggshells, and portions of the skin of wild animals seemed to indicate that they had been recently inhabited. Afternoon was past now, and evening was at hand, the eastern slopes of the Drakenberg were all in a shadow, though broad flakes of red and orange-tinted light poured through the kloofs and ravines.

Douglas asked Van Bloom how far they were from the Ingogo, but could elicit no distinct answer either from him or Erasmus.

A change had come over the bearing of both. They were dogged and silent, or only conversed together, and then in low tones; or with Hans Swartboy, whose fierce and crafty eyes regarded Douglas unpleasantly from time to time. Van Bloom and Erasmus rode together in front, as guides. The rest of the escort, eight in number, followed in the rear of Douglas and Puxleigh, who rode side by side, and ere long became disagreeably conscious that some treachery was intended.

'If we are fairly paroled, why is the escort so strong, and

why make a secret of where the river lies?' remarked Douglas in a low voice to his friend.

'Whatever these fellows may have *in petto*,' replied Puxleigh, 'I think they dare not violate the orders of their general, Joubert.'

'Dare not! Don't they show flags of truce for the express purpose of firing under and on them?'

'True.'

'And for what reason were we deprived of our ammunition?'

'I cannot say—unless to render us more defenceless, if they meditate ultimate mischief or treachery.'

'Isn't it Bolingbroke who says there "is so much fuss in coming into this world and in going out of it, that it is not worth while being here at all?"' said Douglas, with one of his saturnine smiles, while the mellow sunset fell on his dark face.

'I can't tell; but, by Jove, we may be sent out of it without much fuss for all that I can see; and life is very precious, for all that Bolingbroke might think.'

The friends had now a fresh cause for surmise, when—as they were manifestly drawing near the Ingogo, and getting among the broken ground, that was rough and encumbered by clumps of trees—Van Bloom, Erasmus, and two others, without any orders given or received, without any remark or courtesy of saying farewell, but as if in accordance with some preconcerted arrangement, put their horses to a gallop, and disappeared in a hollow to the right. One of those who accompanied them was Hans Swartboy.

'I shall not think we are safe until we are on the other side of the stream—if even then!' said Douglas, with a sharp glance round him, and the knit in his brow deepening.

Before them lay the Ingogo, now rolling in full flood, bubbling and boiling white as it swept round boulders, rocks, and the trunks of great trees, from the roots of which it had torn away the red soil; and now the friends perceived in the twilight which had fallen, and which made the current of the turbid river seem

black, their guard of Boers, each quietly and stealthily open the breech-lock of his rifle and drop therein a cartridge. To question them as to this proceeding would have been vain, so Douglas and Puxleigh, though their hearts were beating fast, could but glance at each other significantly and otherwise ignore it.

'We go no further,' said one of the Boers ; 'our orders were to see you to the Ingogo. There is the Ingogo ; cross it at once.'

'It is impossible to cross here,' said Douglas, in a firm tone of remonstrance.

'Why ?'

'The river is, as you see, in full flood.'

'That is nothing to us.'

'We should be swept away !'

'That is your look-out—not mine,' replied the fellow, with a grin of malice and cruelty.

'We must choose our own place and time for crossing.'

'And we are to wander about all night till you find a drift to please you ?' was the surly question.

'We do not require you. Go back to the Commandant-General Joubert, and report that you have seen us to the Ingogo, and we shall shift for ourselves.'

'Our orders are to see you *across* the Ingogo, and if you do not at once obey us, it will be the worse for yourselves !' replied the fellow, slapping the butt of a Martini-Henri rifle, picked up after the massacre of the 94th Regiment which inaugurated the war.

'Scoundrels !' muttered Douglas under his breath, as he saw that, in a refinement of cruelty, these fellows had brought them to a deep part of the river, and hoped to make their death by drowning a pastime—protracted, if possible.

'*Pas oop !*' cried one (pass up). 'I think you will find a drift near yonder cotton bushes,' he added, laughing.

'Come, Puxleigh, we have nothing left for it but to make the attempt ere it is too dark : and by the ripple at the place which this fellow indicates, I think our horses may find footing.'

'All right ; but it looks precious like a case of drowning.'

'Well,' said a Boer, who knew English; 'a man must die some time—why not now, as well as another time?'

And a hoarse, mocking laugh escaped them all, as they leaned on their rifles and looked leisurely on, while Douglas and his companion, walking their horses carefully to the point indicated, approached, by its rough and shelving bank, the flow of the darkened stream, in which a few stars were already reflected.

Their horses took to the water with manifest reluctance, and the use of the spur was requisite to enforce their progress, as the rush and turbid appearance of the river evidently scared them.

They had hardly entered it, when from a little distance on the right a series of rifle-shots flashed redly out from a knoll on which Van Bloom, Erasmus, and Swartboy had posted themselves, with the distinct intention of taking pot-shots at their victims in the water!

'The scoundrels are firing on us!' exclaimed Tom Puxleigh; 'we shall be murdered as Elliot of the 94th was!'

Around them the bullets made spouts and bells in the water, above which little more than their own heads and those of their horses, as they lay low on the manes of the latter, were visible.

Fierce and high was the wrath of Douglas at that terrible moment—the natural emotion of a brave and spirited man, trapped to a helpless death by cowardly treachery. Not a shot could be given in return. His brow was knit; the veins in his temples were swollen; he breathed hard and fast, and the blood seemed to sing in his ears. Fear of death in a fair field possessed neither him nor Tom Puxleigh, but it was hard and bitter to die *thus*! Tom's horse turned a turtle under him; fortunately, so far he had his feet out of the stirrups, and he came up on the other side, with the animal between him and the enemy, when bullets were making the water hiss around; a loud snort and a convulsion of the legs announced that the animal was hit. Indeed, a ball had pierced its brain, and it floated away on the current, dragging with it poor Puxleigh, whose wrist had got entangled in the reins. Douglas made a wild but futile

attempt to clutch Tom as he swept past him, but he was torn from his grasp, and disappeared in an eddy of the stream ; so, to all appearance, Tom was gone ; but it was only a human life—one unit more in that odious war, after all ! The horse of Douglas was now struck by several bullets, and also floated helplessly away ; but he dived under the water, and was swept down the river by the current for several yards under the shelter of some mangroves, to which he clung with desperate tenacity, while Van Bloom and his companions, after firing a few shots at random after the floating horse, went laughingly off, and Douglas found himself alone, in darkness, silence, and solitude ; he knew not where, but at all events on that side of the Ingogo where our troops were.

‘ This atrocity cancels my parole of honour ; and poor Tom Puxleigh’s has been cancelled with a vengeance ! ’ thought he, as he swung himself up out of the cool current and found himself safe on the river’s bank, but drenched, sodden, and in a very miserable condition indeed, and unable to foresee what might happen next. In the vague hope of yet succouring Puxleigh, his first impulse was to rush along the river’s bank for some distance ; but not a trace of him could he see, or of either of their horses. The fierce and rapid current had swept them all away. He knew not which way to turn precisely, till the glimpse of a star or two, with which he had become familiar, indicated the north-east, the direction where he supposed the British camp must be. All night long he walked, avoiding houses, which was easily done, as they were so far apart ; struggling sometimes through thickets, over vast spaces of rocky and sandy waste ; through fields of old sugar canes, with vague terrors of snakes (among them the boa constrictor), the hyena or tree-tiger and other wild animals, as he had not even a cartridge with which to defend him now ; and as day was dawning, he cast himself down, exhausted and weary, to sleep close by a quince hedge, which indicated the vicinity of a Boer’s farm, or some such residence.

‘ Well,’ thought he, with a kind of dogged despair in his soul,

‘there is nothing in this world that I care for now, save Violet, and I don’t know if I even do that! I feel as if I had no heart left—or if I have, that it is frozen within me. Poor Tom—poor Tommy Puck!’

CHAPTER L:

LOST IN LONDON

FROM the utter barbarism of the Boer War, let us change the scene for a time to the civilized city of London.

We have already referred to the newspaper notice of the disappearance of Sir Jahleel, which Douglas saw in *Natal*, and which occasioned him so much perplexity by its reference to another member of his family who had also left her home, without any apparent reason therefor. Kate was seated alone in the drawing-room at Belgravia, as the winter evening drew on, awaiting the return of Sir Jahleel, who was to escort her to an oratorio at the Albert Hall—not that he affected such things much, but it was considered the right thing to go occasionally, especially if the tickets were at a high figure. She was elaborately and richly dressed. Ricochette had put the last finishing touches to her pale, but shiny hair, and she was not sorry to have been seen thus arrayed for conquest by Sir Harry Honeywood, who had recently called, and had been assured by her that Violet was well and happy, and was with some friends in Scotland. Tapleigh, the butler, announced that ‘dinner was ready—should it be served?’

‘Not till papa’s return,’ replied Kate, glancing at a beautiful French clock, the hands of which indicated half-past six. ‘It was ordered an hour earlier than usual, as we have an engagement—and he is already late.’

The butler bowed and withdrew. Seven o’clock struck, and still there was no appearance of that mirror of punctuality, the City banker, who was ever so by the mere force of early business habits. Kate’s surprise became blended with impatience as she

thought of the oratorio, of the friends whom she expected to see at it, and how awkward it would be if he proved much later.

‘Perhaps he has dined at the club, miss,’ suggested Mr. Tapleigh, when the next half-hour struck; ‘and as he will probably pick you up, might it not be as well for you to dine, and be ready?’

Kate approved of this suggestion, and had her dinner in solitary state, with Tapleigh and one tall footman in attendance. Never in her life before had she dined alone, and the effect, surrounded as she was with all the luxury and splendour to which she was accustomed, proved, she knew not why, depressing to her. Was this a prevision of coming evil? Dinner was soon over, and she returned to the drawing-room. How empty that magnificent apartment looked! The hands of the clock now stood at half-past eight. The oratorio would be begun, and Dolly, Sheldon, and others would be wondering and surmising as to the non-appearance of herself and Sir Jahleel. He would never loiter at the club when he had an appointment with her, and she so fully expected him; and, had business intervened, he would, as he always did, even on the slightest occasions, have sent her a telegram. What did this mean? she opened and shut her fan impatiently; then she cast it aside with her opera cloak; anon, she drew off her gloves. Even when he did arrive it would be almost useless to think of the Albert Hall that night. Her impatience in time changed to alarm as the night crept on, for this unexplained absence in one so regular, and who had so many facilities for communicating with her, was altogether without a parallel in her past experience. Every moment she expected the brougham which he used for City purposes to drive up to the door—to hear his familiar step in the porch, and the sound of the latch-key in the keyhole. Every vehicle that entered the square she thought must be the brougham conveying him home; but cab and hansom, carriage and brougham, all bowled in succession past the house, or drew up at other doors; and now midnight was at hand! Midnight,

and no sign of that mirror of order and punctuality, old Sir Jahleel ! As she thought of his years, alarm lest a fit of apoplexy might perhaps have seized him, or fear that he might have met with some accident more or less fatal, began to terrify Kate ; but even in any of these instances it was unlikely that, with a man of his consequence, tidings of it would not within six hours have reached his residence. Time crept on. How slowly hour followed hour that would have seemed to fly fast enough had she been at a ball ! Could this unwonted absence have reference to Violet ? Could he have obtained a clue to her movements, and discovered where, and how, and why, she was so mysteriously and eccentrically secluding herself from her friends and family ?

But even then he would have telegraphed home. Kate paced the room feverishly. She drew back the blue velvet and white-laced window curtains, and looked into the now foggy night from the balcony, where, in summer, the handsome majolica vases held rich flowers and rare exotics : but she looked and listened in vain, while thinking, or repeating to herself, for the hundredth time : ‘ *What* can detain him—*where* can he have gone ?’

Hour after hour went by, indicated by the dial and melodious little bell of the drawing-room clock, under its glass shade on the marble mantel-piece ; wheels rolled past ; steps went by and died away in the distance ; there were alternate pauses, and then total cessation of the usual street noises, as silence, or nearly so, fell on all in the great Belgravian Square ; and yet hour by hour, with genuine alarm gathering in her heart, and tears—a most unwonted effort for her—welling up, though crushed, in her eyes, waiting for one who never came ; and we are doubtful if human life contains or feels an agony greater than this ! ‘ How interminable seem the hours whilst undergoing that penance of waiting !’ says a writer. ‘ For surely it is a penance, an atonement in some degree for an undue impatience in trying to steal a march upon the old mower, who

grimly smiles at our puny efforts to put backward or forward the hands of his unerring dial. It is truly a dreary and monotonous affair, and yet it seems as if life were passed in thus exercising one's patience.'

Cold, chilled, and weary, after being tantalized by the useless surmises of the yawning and worn-out Ricochette, she retired to bed for the remainder of the morning, in hope that Sir Jahleel might admit himself by his latchkey, and at breakfast would be able to explain the cause of a detention so unexpected and every way so unusual. Brief though her sleep, Kate was up betimes, and was having her hair manipulated by the deft fingers of Ricochette, when Mrs. Jellybagg entered her dressing-room in unceremonious haste to announce that Sir Jahleel had not come home yet—that his valet, when going as usual to waken him, had found his apartment tenantless—his bed unslept in !

It was not the first time now that a similar announcement had been made to Kate Jermy : but a mortal paleness spread over her usually proud and placid face, and she felt as if her heart grew still ! Gathering her rich robe-de-chambre about her, she rushed, without uttering a word, past the old and scared housekeeper and sprang up the staircase, instinctively calling on her father by name as she sought his room.

' Papa—papa—oh, papa !'

No answer came. His dressing-gown lay over the back of a chair ; his slippers were under it, near the unused bed ; his toilet apparatus lay on the table before the mirror, thus imparting a sense alike of his presence and absence that proved very oppressive to Kate.

' Can he be with Dolly—but why, oh ! why ?' she exclaimed piteously ; and after a hasty toilette—too impatient to wait for the carriage—without breakfasting, she threw herself into a cab and drove to Harley Street, to share her alarm with Dolly.

Sir Jahleel was not with the latter, nor had she seen him for several days. Accompanied by Vincent Sheldon, the sisters,

with growing fears, drove to his club, and were informed that he had not been there the whole of yesterday.

'To Gresham Street, and drive quick,' said Vincent Sheldon; 'the offices will be open now.'

Thither the trio drove, only to find that he was not at his usual place of business, and that he had left it yesterday at an earlier hour than usual.

'In his brougham?' asked Vincent Sheldon impetuously.

Messrs. Quills, Pinfold, and other clerks could not quite agree on this matter, but on reference to the stables it would appear that he had gone away on foot. Away—to where? Speculation was rife but endless. To be lost in London is like being cast into the middle of the Atlantic.

'Perhaps he may have come home in the interim,' suggested the now pallid and miserable Kate, but after a drive back to Belgravia this was found to be a futile hope.

'To Gray's Inn!' was the next order of Vincent Sheldon, who began to fear—after his past experience of Sir Jahleel's connection with Joab Scrowle—he scarcely knew what; but that some mighty loss, some false speculation, and the prospect of impending ruin might have turned the old man's brain and prompted suicide. Thus he sought at once the family solicitor in one of the dreary courts of that great legal barrack off High Holborn. Sir Jahleel was a wealthy, important, and lucrative client, and the solicitor heard of his curious absence with some concern; made some minute inquiries of Kate, which elicited and suggested nothing, but begged his visitors to remain for a time while he made some inquiries. He despatched his clerks in all directions. An active search was made at all the hospitals and dispensaries in vain; and from the central offices the wires were in operation to every police station in the city and suburbs; and a few hours' time sufficed to render it evident that no street accident and no illness had befallen Sir Jahleel, who always bore about with him, in pocket-book and card-case, sufficient proofs of his identity.

'If he was a child, or ignorant of the City and its ways,' said Vincent Sheldon in utter bewilderment, 'we might suppose he had come to grief; but with a man of his experience it is all horribly unaccountable.'

The evening of the second day was drawing on now, and to the weeping sisters the solicitor, who had accompanied them home, proved but a kind of Job's comforter after all.

'My dear young ladies,' said he, patting Dolly on the head, as he had often done in her childhood, 'in this Babylon of the nineteenth century, mysterious and unaccountable disappearances occur every day. A country client of mine left my office one forenoon three months ago—a sober and steady man of irreproachable habits and character—to seek apartments in Bayswater, and has never since been heard of; and notwithstanding all the efforts I have made, all the rewards I have offered, and all the assistance of the police, he has never been seen or heard of since. I have known of three other instances, all occurring in the forenoon in the open light of the day; and when such things occur thus, as a writer in the papers lately said, what may happen under cover of darkness, and what numbers must disappear in the course of twelve months—far above a thousand, I believe—a calculation that is simply appalling!'

'And dear papa left his chambers in Gresham Street just as darkness began to fall,' sobbed Dolly.

By the active prosecution of his inquiries next day Vincent obtained the exact hour at which Sir Jahleel did leave his place of business, and also that he had been seen in Gresham Street conversing with a little man, the general description of which unsavoury person corresponded with that of Mr. Joab Scrowle.

'Scrowle again!' thought Vincent, who deemed the circumstance startling, but said nothing of it to Kate or his little wife Dolly. Four days passed without a vestige of the lost man being traced! In addition to the horror and doubt, grief, and anxiety of Kate, she felt a shock to that pride which formed so much a part of her nature, to have this second *fiasco* or event

occurring in the household after the disappearance of Violet, whose voluntary absence did not cause the alarm it might have done, in consequence of the calm tenour of her farewell letter ; but that absence excited now a certain indignation against her in the mind of Kate, with the natural expectation that on hearing of this calamity, as she was certain to do through the public prints, Violet would return home. To avoid the friends who called hourly to inquire and condole, Kate kept her room, alleging illness ; and saw none save Sir Harry Honeywood, whose consolations she was not unwilling to receive, and the family solicitor ; but she totally denied herself to Mr. Octave Paschal Bede, the tractarian curate, who having been foiled ignominiously in his love-making with her, and not even having succeeded in establishing an ecclesiastical flirtation, had taken to urging the celibacy of the clergy, and preaching against marriage, to the great disquiet of his other young lady hearers. But as day followed day without tidings, and terror deepened, all her natural pride and arrogance were crushed out of Kate, and a kind of womanly softness and feeling of helplessness took their place.

‘The hand of Fate is on us,’ she sobbed one day to old Mrs. Jellybag.

‘True, my dear miss ; this is the second total disappearance as has been in this family !’ replied the housekeeper, with her handkerchief at her eyes ; but she proved a worse consoler even than the solicitor, for her mind and her remarks ran on the number of unknown dead who are fished out of the river, turned up by dredging machines, or found near the Essex marshes—gone beyond all chance of recognition, and of the nameless dead who lie in mortuaries waiting for those to come and claim them who never do either.

But the inquiries prosecuted by the solicitor and police authorities proved that he would not be lying in any of the parish receptacles, wherein, as in the Morgue at Paris, people may come all day to see if they can recognise their lost ones ; but

there are lives—especially in London and Paris—so lonely that none miss the living, when death comes, be it sought or unsought.

Kate Jermyrn knew the London of wealth, light, pleasure, gaiety, and boundless extravagance ; but she knew not the sordid London of famine and crime, of misery and death—the London of the vast crowds.

‘Of the brave spirits who go up to woo
That terrible city whose neglect is death,
Whose smile is fame ; the prosperous one who sits
Sole in the summer sun ; the crowd who die
Unmentioned, as a wave which breaks
On undiscovered shores.’

By the time a week had nearly passed, and the police had exhausted their efforts to trace Sir Jahleel, the papers began to suggest rather wild hypotheses on the subject, and these added to the anguish of his daughter—he had been drugged and destroyed for the sake of his valuable gold watch and whatever else was upon him, and, sooth to say, this seemed like enough ; that he was a member of some secret society—a Freemason who had broken his vows, and as a punishment had been slain, thrown into the Thames, or been buried in quicklime ; that he was decoyed into some terrible den, and there kept a prisoner for some mysterious purpose. That a stout old gentleman, an Alderman of the City, should be whisked away like a baby, at an early hour in the evening, within a pistol-shot of the Bank of England, and vanish without leaving a trace behind him, seemed utterly incredible on one hand ; and that he, a man of wealth, regular and abstemious habits, of high reputation on ‘Change, and of unblemished character, should have gone suddenly mad, or taken to foolish freaks to cause excitement, was equally incredible on the other ; but be that as it may, with his departure through the closing door of his office in Gresham Street, the record of his life seemed to have closed also ; and for all that could be traced of him, even by the most expert detectives, he was as completely beyond the ken of inquiry as he had passed through the gate of death !

CHAPTER LI.

IN RATCLIFF HIGHWAY.

AND now to account for this new mystery which had proved so distressing to Kate and to Dolly. On the evening Kate was to have been at the oratorio, escorted by Sir Jahleel—a rather gloomy and foggy one in December—the latter was seated in his office in Gresham Street; he had just re-read the money article and studied the stock markets; his mind was full of Board of Works scrip, Colonial Securities, the Grand Trunk of Canada, New York Central, and so forth, and an expression of satisfaction was stealing across his face, though his eyes were fixed on vacancy, as he played with his hands deep in his trousers pockets among the coin there, gold in one, silver in the other, when suddenly a figure stood before him. He looked up and could scarcely believe his eyes, on finding himself face to face once more with—Joab Scrowle! Within the last few months the lines in Mr. Scrowle's face had deepened considerably; his cheeks were haggard, his eyes more bloodshot. He evidently missed the 'flesh-pots' of Barons Hall, and the world had not been using Mr. Scrowle well since his forcible expulsion from Mr. Sheldon's house in Harley Street; but he seemed to be literally saturated with alcohol.

'You here again!' exclaimed Sir Jahleel, in sudden wrath.

'Yes—as you see,' replied Scrowle, putting a finger to the side of his nose, winking, and slapping his right cheek; 'but don't raise your voice—mum's the word, and I come as a friend.'

'You are very daring, you infer——'

'Now, no harsh words, and don't meddle with that bell till you hear me out.'

'You dare not pretend that you have come for money now?'

'No.'

'For what, then?'

'Now don't touch that, I tell you,' exclaimed Scrowle, as Sir Jahleel's hand approached the bell-handle again.

'I shall summon the police.'

'Police again, as it used to be. Don't I tell you I come as a friend,' said Scrowle, mopping his head as he was wont to do, and then rolling the rag which he used as a handkerchief into a ball. 'You remember that I recalled to your memory in Harley Street, when Dolly slipped through our fingers, that you had another daughter—Violet.'

'You did,' replied Sir Jahleel, bewildered by the presumption of Scrowle, and actually feeling some of the influence and terror of the fellow stealing over him again.

'Well—she is missing—so I have come to remind you of her existence again.'

Greater grew the agitation of Sir Jahleel.

'Heavens,' thought he, 'can it be that this mysterious wretch was connected in any way with the unseemly departure of Violet?'

He had done so with the departure of Lord Torthorwald, or rather Douglas, as she only knew him. Sir Jahleel was certain from Violet's character that she could not have obtained any information of *who* his secretary really was and proved to be, otherwise she would never have left home to follow him, as she had done perhaps; for of the love that sees all existence and self concentrated in another, Sir Jahleel had not the least conception! He had early scanned the death lists of the war in South Africa for the name of Douglas, and perhaps gladly would have seen it there, but as yet he had looked in vain; and now came Scrowle with alleged tidings of Violet.

'Great heavens!' he thought, with an emotion like suffocation in his throat, 'can it be that she has come to peril, shame, or grief when a creature like this is cognisant of her movements?'

'What *can* you possibly know about my absent daughter?' he asked, in a low and husky voice.

'All.'

'All?'

'I know and knew a great deal about you, so why not of *her*?'

'All!' repeated Sir Jahleel mechanically.

'And if you would wish to know about her, and her safety, follow me.'

'Where?'

'Where I shall lead you.'

'Oh God!' groaned Sir Jahleel; 'my gentle Violet—can such things be? Is this a vengeance on my daughter for my sin?'

'It will be, if you don't follow quickly, and quietly too, and without exciting any suspicions among them quill-drivers of yours.'

'Where has she been?'

'That you will learn in time.'

'What has she been about since she left home?'

'Gallivanting perhaps,' replied Scrowle, with a multitude of winks.

'You can at least tell me where she is now?'

'And then you would put the bobbies on her track and mine. No, no; I know a trick worth two of that. You can only learn all about her by coming along with me.'

'The police.'

'Oh, don't talk about them, or I am mum, and you will never see her again in this world.'

'The world seems coming to a pretty pass!'

'So it is, and it ain't worth worritting about.'

'If money is necessary——'

'A little may be necessary, but not now,' replied Scrowle, again rolling his handkerchief into a ball. 'Once again, and for the last time I say, will you come with me?'

Sir Jahleel sat a few moments in silence. He knew nothing of Violet's silent vow, its import or intention. He only knew that leaving a loving and farewell letter she had quietly left home, raised a handsome sum of money on her jewels, and gone—he knew not where, though expecting daily to hear of her,

from herself. Now came this wretch Scrowle, who knew so much of his family and his affairs ; and perhaps he also might know something of Violet and her movements. The heart of the unhappy father seemed to die within him—to die with sheer vague and undefined apprehensions, he knew not of what ; but he felt himself impelled and compelled to accompany Joab Scrowle, of whom he had once thought on that day in Harley Street he had heard and seen the last, in this world, at least.

‘Violet,’ he muttered ; ‘my daughter—well, well ! I am too old to expect much gratitude in the young, or tender memory in the absent, and she is both young and absent ; but—but, come on then, Scrowle,’ he added, taking his hat and umbrella.

‘The evening is chill—hadn’t you better put on your great-coat ?’

‘Yes—thanks,’ he replied, as Scrowle assisted him to assume the garment in question—a garment which the latter hoped to appropriate ere long.

‘Violet is not dead ?’ said Sir Jahleel, with a sudden emotion of alarm.

‘Dead !’ said Scrowle, with a laugh ; ‘no—she is all alive and kicking.’

If not dead, *where* and in what plight might he find her—his peerless Violet ? As the pair passed into the street, Sir Jahleel’s haggard eyes followed a passing constable, muffled in his shining glazed cape.

‘A word to one of these fellows,’ said Scrowle warningly, ‘and you will never see your daughter again, nor can any power on earth unseal my lips on the subject, and I may be the ruin of you yet, and her too.’

‘Do you imagine, fellow, that you could harm me *now* ?’

‘You had better learn, Sir Jahleel, that no man, however poor, and I am poor, or however humble, and I am humble, but may work mischief if he has the will. So come along—here is a cab !’

Seated in the hansom, Sir Jahleel, even amid his confusion and anxiety, hoped that none of his City friends might see him

with such a companion as Joab Scrowle ; but he felt thankful that the evening was foggy and darkening fast.

‘How are the other two young ladies?’ asked Scrowle, who now suddenly seemed to become quite facetious ; ‘and, more particularly, how is my late intended, Miss Dolly?’

Sir Jahleel made no response, so the other continued : ‘Ah ! too bad of her to throw over her own Joab for that fellow Selby—or must we call him Sheldon?—and leave me with no more resources for fun than a kitten deprived of its tail.’

Passing along the streets that were indicated by the baggy umbrella of Scrowle, the hansom proceeded through Eastcheap, passed the north side of the Tower, and eastward by Smithfield, into low and squalid parts, that Sir Jahleel had scarcely ever seen since his boyhood.

‘Where are you going?’ he asked at length.

‘To Ratcliff Highway,’ replied Scrowle, with a grin.

‘Ratcliff Highway? Merciful heavens, what a place to seek my daughter in!’ said Sir Jahleel, with a groan, while, cold as the evening was, with damp and frosty fog, the beads of hot perspiration rolled over his brow.

‘It is called St. George’s Street now, by way of making it more genteel, I suppose ; but it was plain Ratcliff Highway when you and I were young.’

This, we may inform our readers, is a low quarter of the eastern part of the City—a semi-marine region—and the thoroughfare in question is the Regent Street of seamen from all parts of the world, and they seldom extend their walks in London beyond it. In the days of Stowe it was an open road, ‘with fair elm trees on both the sides.’ Now it is all fetid and low lodging-houses, with taverns redolent with gas, tobacco, and gin ; and here, too, are wild beast shops and yards crammed with lions, tigers, hyenas, monkeys, and pelicans—places where the sailors sell their pets and barter foreign curiosities. In the annals of London and in the memory of many, Ratcliff Highway is only associated with barbarous stories of outrage, crime,

and many murders, such as those of the entire Swan family, even to the infant in its cradle, in 1811, and, twelve days subsequently, the massacre of another family at the King's Arms public-house, all by a seaman named Williams, who was executed therefor, and buried in a hole, where now the New Road crosses and Cannon Street begins. With reference to these and other events in Ratcliff Highway, Macaulay, when writing of the alarm in England at the reported murder of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, says: 'Many of our readers can remember the state of London just after the murder of Swan and Williamson—the terror which was in every face, the careful barring of doors, the providing of blunderbusses and watchmen's rattles. We know of a shopkeeper who sold three hundred rattles in about ten hours, so those who remember that panic may be able to form some notion of the state of England after the death of Godfrey.'

The Ratcliffe murders excited the imagination of De Quincey, the opium eater, who wrote a wonderful though inaccurate account of them. To this region of terrible associations was Sir Jahleel brought in a winter evening late, when a thick and pestilential fog overhung all Wapping and the river, and his heart seemed to sink lower with every revolution of the cab-wheels. It was simply awful to think of having to seek for his daughter—Violet Jermy—in such a place! He felt as one in a nightmare, a dismal dream, the details of which he could not realize. At last the hansom drew up at the narrow door of a mean-looking house in a lane off the main street.

'Here we are at last!' said Scrowle, leaping out.

Less agilely, Sir Jahleel followed, and was in the act of handing a sovereign to the driver, saying simply, 'Change, please,' when Scrowle snatched it and gave it to the Jehu, pocketing the difference of the fare.

'I am not accustomed to lose my change thus, Mr. Scrowle,' said Sir Jahleel, resenting the petty theft.

'What a friend gets is never lost—and *Mister* Scrowle—why

don't you say Joab, old fellow ?' was the bantering response, as the door was opened and the hansom departed.

Could his beautiful, his delicately-nurtured and idolised Violet be in such a place as this ? thought the unhappy father ; and when he reckoned the time she had been absent, his soul died within him. All that passed, passed quickly now. Thrust by unseen hands along a narrow passage, into a dark room—or one lit only by a meagre candle—Sir Jahleel had only time to see himself confronted by two ill-looking fellows, when he received a terrible blow behind the head—a blow which made him reel. He was next only conscious of having his greatcoat torn off him, his watch being taken, and his pockets rifled, when he became senseless.

CHAPTER LII.

A HALT ON THE MARCH.

WE last left Douglas taking his rest like a gipsy under the shelter of a quince hedge, near a Boer's farm, which was within five or six miles of the eastern slope of the Drakenberg range of mountains. After a brief sleep he awoke soon after sunrise, chilled and stiff, his clothing scarcely dry, and his limbs sensible of many a bruise, of which he had previously been unaware, but which he must have received as he scrambled up the bank of the Ingogo river. Moreover, in the dark, he had forced his way through some dense clumps of the wild aloe which grows there in rich profusion, and his hands and legs were stuck full of long thorns and spines. After all he had undergone he felt an intense thirst, and began to seek for the farmhouse, which was certain to be near. He was aware that as soon as day came in, the Boers proceed to their kraals, and turn out all their live stock, counting carefully every horse, cow, and sheep, as they emerge ; after which they return home, when a cup of black coffee and a well-filled pipe await them in the hands of the vrouw,

and that from then till mid-day they will stand with their hands thrust into the pockets of their leathern 'crackers,' smoking, and lazily watching the country road, or track, winding away through the lonely *veldt*.

There, on the immediate borders of the Transvaal, he knew that many of the Boers were hostile, but as it was not in the blood of Douglas to dread peril or weigh contingencies, he put his sword under his arm, and went straight along the path to the farmhouse, at which, as he expected, he saw a Boer leisurely smoking and looking about him under the shadowy rim of his broad-leaved hat.

On seeing an armed man approaching, more than all one wearing a white tropical helmet, he entered the house, and quickly reappearing with a rifle in his hand, called upon Douglas to stand back, and then to be off, or worse would happen.

'I will not trespass on you, mynheer,' replied Douglas, 'further than to ask you for a cup of coffee or a glass of beer.'

The hospitality of the Boer is remarkable. They usually give any stranger board and lodging gratis, charging only for forage for horses and cattle, but this fellow was surly, and laughingly warned Douglas again to be off.

'A glass of water, then,' urged the latter.

To this modest request he only responded by a louder laugh, as if he enjoyed the idea of an Englishman being brought to so desperate a pass.

'I will pay you for it,' said Douglas.

'Ach, Gott, the *Volksteem* tells us you Englishers buy and sell everything—even your wives' honour—or take money for it in the courts of law. No, no—not even a glass of water for money.'

The *Volksteem* is the Conservative organ in the Transvaal.

'You can at least direct me to the camp of General Colley, or Fort Amiel, or I may perish of hunger in the *veldt*.'

To this the reply was that *der Teydel* might direct him, and that if his bones were picked by the vultures there would 'be one infernal Engländer less in the world. Now will you be off?'

he added, 'or——' and with a menacing manner there was no mistaking, he slapped the butt of the rifle with his right hand.

Finding that it was useless to parley longer with this decidedly unpleasant personage, Douglas, his proud heart swelling with pride and anger, turned away, and once more sought the high road, or what passed for such ; nor until he was at a considerable distance from the house was he uncertain of being shot down in pure lust of cruelty, for he knew that every Boer from his boyhood upward is used to the rifle as a sporting weapon, and that few can compete with him in the extraordinary calculation of distance and accuracy of aim ; while, moreover, they are all armed with the most expensive modern rifles of precision—Winchester repeating, Enfield, Snider, Westley Richards (falling-block pattern), and Martini-Henry, with the best of ammunition, as we found to our cost at Laing's Nek, Ingogo, and Majuba Hill. No hostile shot followed him. Thus he pursued the path, which, by the deep wheel-ruts and marks of ox-hoofs it exhibited, he felt convinced must lead to some town. The bright sun was high in the blue sky ; his spirits began to rise, and he trod on, ready for whatever Fate had in store for him, with that perfect confidence in the future which the young heart alone enjoys, and fortunately for itself, generally possesses. He wandered many miles—perhaps more than fifteen—without knowing in what direction ; and once more at a drift, or ford, crossed a river, which, though he knew it not, was again the Ingogo. The sky was full of golden-tinted clouds ; there was gilding on the green summits of the Drakenberg, and the plain below them was steeped in a flood of light. He knew that then, by the waysides at home, meadow and woodland and hedgerow were all gay with scented violets, the delicate bluebell, the pale primrose and golden buttercup, but as he trod onward he saw objects of a very different kind. In one place lay the bones of an ox that had sunk by the wayside when inspanned with some team, and all around them the ground was torn and bared by the hyænas that had been fighting over the animal, as with teeth

and claws they had rent it to fragments, which were strewed amid the cactus and other thorny bushes. A great black eagle perched upon a mass of granite, beating its wings and strangling a serpent with its beak, was an appropriate feature in this scene ; nor was another of a grimmer nature wanting—a human skull bare and white, fixed on a stake, and which had probably been that of some luckless Briton, as some would-be comical Boer had stuck between the teeth a short clay pipe. At a *spruit*, or stream, he obtained a draught of water. This, and a few 'Kaffir chestnuts,' as they are named, formed his hermit-like repast, and again he hastened on, the knowledge that hyænas were in the adjacent thickets by no means adding to his ease of mind ; but from their recesses he heard no sound save the occasional bark of a baboon ; though he experienced something like an electric shock when, at the turn of the road, he saw, for the first time, one of those tree-leopards which are caught in traps constructed of large stones and timber, perched high up in a cleft or between the double stem of a thornwood tree, where it sat switching its magnificent tail and eyeing him leisurely. He had his revolver, true ; but, thanks to Van Bloom and his comrades, not a single cartridge !

The circumstance of this animal being up a tree and consequently at bay proved that it had been scared by something ; and the cause soon became apparent, for just as Douglas was entering a kloof or gorge the sound of a cavalry trumpet made his heart leap, and a few minutes after he came upon a troop of the Queen's Hussars. They had halted on the march, dismounted, and were in the act of finishing a repast they had prepared and cooked for themselves. They wore blue with scarlet facings, and, in lieu of busby and plume, the inevitable white helmet, which becomes such a dangerous object in action. Their horses were picketed, and at the saddle of each hung a forage bag of corn cut green and dried, with the grain. They were all *en route* for Fort Amiel, as a hussar informed Douglas, whose appearance excited some surprise and comment, as he

wore cavalry spurs and was on foot. He at once approached the spot where, a little apart from their men, the three officers were picnicking and reclining at their ease on the grass with their swords and unbuckled belts beside them. They proved to be Major Tandem, Captain Bramley, and another, whom Douglas remembered to have seen at the house of Sir Jahleel Jermyn. The salt breezes of the southern Atlantic and the sun of Cape Colony had already deeply embrowned them and all their men, who were regaling themselves on the half-raw beef of a lung-sick baggage bullock, with native biscuits and a salad made of some wild vegetables found by the wayside, but one with which they, poor fellows, were contented enough, and all as merry as crickets. Douglas at once introduced himself to Tandem, who took his hand in blank astonishment.

'You out here!' he exclaimed. 'By Jove, how much smaller this terrestrial globe of ours is than we take it to be!'

'You look faint and actually ill,' remarked Bramley, who, as usual, was scanning him closely, but not so superciliously.

'Come, seat yourself,' said Tandem; 'we are just having tiffin—tinned beef and biscuits, brandy and water; here is my cigar case; help yourself.'

A hussar who was in attendance soon supplied the wants of Douglas, who now felt himself safe and among friends.

'It is strange to find you here, certainly,' said Bramley, after a pause, 'and once again a dragoon.'

'Again?'

'Yes; you belong to some corps of local horse, I presume?'

'I certainly hope to do so, or my journey out here will have been futile; but I never was a dragoon—except, perhaps, in heart.'

'What! Did I not meet you at Vienna, when you were in the Austrian Cuirassiers, under old Count Taaffe?'

'Excuse me,' replied Douglas, with reddened cheek and knitted brow, 'you met my half-brother, Cospatrick, who belonged to the First Regiment. There is a wonderful likeness between us, though we are the sons of different mothers.'

'Why, you are as much alike as two bullets or two eggs!' exclaimed Bramley.

'The similarity has more than once proved a source of inconvenience to me.'

'So I should think,' added Bramley, whose mind no doubt reverted to the gambling affair at Monaco; 'but how are you here—dismounted, and alone?'

Douglas related to them all that had befallen him and Tom Puxleigh after the battle of Ingogo, and the catastrophe which had befallen their brother officer at the hands of the cruel and barbarous Boers elicited many a bitter malediction on the latter, many expressions of regret for his untimely death, and many a laughing reminiscence of him; and to these Douglas now added the adventure of the double-bedded room at Windvogel, and the subsequent revengeful suspicions of Erasmus and Heer van Bloom. After a time Tandem called the trumpeter to his side. 'We must be making tracks—inspanning, I think, they call it here,' said he laughingly. 'Boot and saddle,' was blown; the horses were unpicketed; the troop mounted, formed fours, and resumed the line of march, Douglas accompanying it on a spare horse lent him by Bramley, and the route was taken direct to Fort Amiel. The men and horses were in excellent condition, though the country which they had to traverse between Pietermaritzburg, the capital, or, as the Natalians love to call it, 'the city,' and Newcastle is rough, hilly, and mountainous on every hand. It is also rather destitute of trees, the farms are few and far between, and only small flocks of sheep are seen grazing, with Zulu herdsmen.

'In every instance,' said Bramley, 'we found the inns and stores kept by British subjects—English people; and, to our surprise, we saw few or no Boers till we drew near the borders of the Transvaal, where now we are.'

CHAPTER LIII.

THE RECONNOITRING PARTY.

GUIDED by a loyal Boer, the Hussars soon reached the road that led direct to Newcastle.

'You knew Honeywood of ours?' said Bramley, as he, Tandem, and Douglas rode together in rear of the troop.

'Intimately.'

'A rare good sort is Harry!' exclaimed Tandem; 'he came a cropper when out hunting, and has remained behind to get well.'

'And to spoon on that Jermyn girl—Violet,' said Bramley, laughing.

Ere Douglas could speak of, or inquire about, the newspaper paragraph, Bramley spoke again.

'I thought the race of Dugald Dalgetties was gone, that the Scottish soldier of fortune was as extinct as the dodo and its kindred. But since meeting you I find I am mistaken; your hope is to join a corps of local horse—like Colonel Carrington's in Basuto Land, I suppose.'

'Yes.'

'A poor inheritance, Mr. Douglas!'

'All that my forefathers have left me.'

'Sorry to hear it.'

'If I don't get some such appointment soon, I shall come to grief,' said Douglas laughingly.

'How?'

'My purse is nearly empty.'

'You may command mine till something turns up.'

'And mine too,' added Tandem.

'A thousand thanks to you both!'

'There is Newcastle in sight, with the Union Jack flying on Fort Amiel,' exclaimed the Major, his eyes sparkling; the lisping and rather *blasé* Tom Tandem, of the Hussar Barracks at Brighton, seemed to have become another man, now that he

was in sight of the Drakenberg mountains, and within a few miles of the enemy. 'We shall soon be face to face with those Boer fellows ; but I am sure that, though man to man they are a match for us—even were our soldiers the finest in the world—we have prestige—they have none, and we shall lick them in the end !'

The Hussars halted at the camp which we have before referred to, and accompanied by Douglas, the Major rode into the fort, to report his arrival to the officer commanding. It chanced to be the day on which Sir Evelyn Wood, whose column had halted within a few miles of Newcastle, met the unfortunate Sir George Pomeroy Colley at Fort Amiel, where they were holding a council of war. Thus there was a considerable bustle in and about the little place, and mounted officers and orderlies were thronging in and out ; among them were Sidney Umphrville and Bedingfeld, with whom Douglas had spent some pleasant hours in Puxleigh's tent. As Douglas and his new friends were dismounting, an officer in a very frayed patrol jacket came hurriedly out of the barracks towards them.

'Puxleigh—Tommy Puck—by all that is wonderful !' exclaimed Tandem, 'not dead after all !'

'No, I am worth a few dead men yet,' replied Puxleigh. 'So glad to see you safe too, Douglas. Our scrape was a devilish close shave !'

'But how did you escape ?' asked Douglas.

'My horse swam the river, and yours——?' said Tom.

'Mine turned a turtle when the bullets struck it, but I reached the bank in safety, and remained *en perdue*, while these treacherous scoundrels fired away at random.'

'I got here without becoming—what I very nearly was—a choice meal for a tree-tiger—ugh, an ugly brute—won't forget it in a hurry. Well, Tandem, my hearty, how goes it in the regiment ?' inquired Tom.

'All right—coming up by squadrons.'

'Seen any of those beasts *en route* ?'

'Who—the Boers?'

'Yes.'

'A few; but they were scouts, and did not oppose us.'

Douglas and Tommy were really mutually glad to see each other again, and shook hands more than once in the intensity of their satisfaction. The council of war was over; a number of officers came forth, and there was much mounting and spurring in hot haste. It now appeared that General Colley was about to cross the Buffalo with an escort of Hussars to reconnoitre the left of the enemy's position, where it rested upon a gorge overlooking the river, and he used some of the Natal police as scouts, and to these, after a farewell glass of sherry with Puxleigh and Tandem, Douglas, on obtaining permission, attached himself.

'You are a strange fellow, Douglas!' said Tandem; 'can't make you out, by Jove.'

'How? Is it wonderful that a man likes his liberty to come here and fight if he chooses, leaving the trammels of civilization behind him?'

'But think of going into action,' urged the hussar, kindly, 'without post or place—fighting for fighting's sake.'

'It seems deuced like knight-errantry, as Puxleigh once said,' replied Douglas, 'but surely something may turn up for me as a soldier of fortune.'

'You are more likely to be helplessly potted at a thousand yards by some Boer lurking on his stomach behind a big stone,' was the not very encouraging response: 'and if wounded——'

'Well, think of honour,' said Douglas, laughing.

'“Can honour set a leg, or an arm, or the grief of a wound?” as Falstaff says.'

'No; but if hit, I care not if it be final, and thanks to these abominable white helmets, the Boers' bullets go straight through the brain,' replied Douglas, as, after getting some ammunition, he laughingly galloped off after the Natal police.

'By Jove, Tom, that fellow has the ring of true nobility in

his metal,' exclaimed Tandem, looking after his retiring figure ; and the hussar knew not how near the truth he was. 'To me he looks like a man who has been born some centuries too late.'

The General with his hussar escort and the mounted police scouts went gaily dashing through the water and up the opposite bank, where with telescope in hand he reconnoitred the Boers' position, and found that they had strongly fortified all that part of it upon which he had made his last attack.

'But it seems to me,' he remarked to Bedingsfeld, of the artillery, and to Douglas, who rode near him, 'that their new earthworks are weak apparently towards the flank of their line.'

'I am confident that we shall be able to carry the position,' said the young artillery officer, 'and that feeling is general among the whole troops.'

'Glad to hear it,' replied the General. 'I should like,' he added, 'to have a message taken to these Boers offering medical assistance for their wounded, whose sufferings must be intense—aid and medicines from Pietermaritzburg. You speak their language, I understand, Mr. Douglas?'

'A little; and shall be glad to be the bearer of your message.'

'This letter, then, addressed to the Boer Commandant at Laing's Nek,' said the General, drawing an official-looking envelope from his right holster; 'take one of the Natal police with you as a guide back to camp, and, believe me, I shall not forget to advance your views.'

Douglas bowed; his heart beat lightly, and, heedless of all the risks he had already run individually, he rode off, accompanied by a local trooper, towards the Boer position; while the General with his escort returned to the camp at Prospect Hill. He had barely reached it, when two hundred yelling Boers were in the act of occupying the very ground he had visited, and Douglas rode fearlessly towards them with a white handkerchief tied to the point of his sword. He delivered his letter to an armed Boer who approached him, and he and his companion were in the act of returning, but had not proceeded many yards,

when the officer commanding our artillery opened a fire upon this advanced party of Boers, at two thousand five hundred yards range, and sent shell after shell to burst over their heads, upon which they dispersed in haste. Enraged probably by this, after a time they began to fire upon Douglas and the trooper, whose horse was shot under him, and he fell with the animal heavily, breaking a leg as he did so. He piteously implored Douglas not to leave him to perish ; and though the aim of the enemy's rifles was deadly and their bullets came every moment past with a *ping*, or into the turf with a thud, he dragged the injured man across the pommel of his saddle, and rode with his horse thus encumbered towards the Buffalo river. The delay and slowness of his progress consequent to all this nearly proved fatal to Douglas himself. His white helmet was grazed by more than one bullet, recalling to his memory the remark he had made so laughingly to Tandem and Puxleigh ; and just when he deemed himself safe and out of range, one struck him in the left shoulder, and, without lodging, ripped up the skin, giving him the sensation of being seared with a hot iron. But he rode steadily on with his helpless burden through the silvery stream and the sunny glades of thorn-trees and yellow-wood into camp, where he was loudly cheered by the soldiers, to whom he gave the man whose life he had saved, and then he turned in search of the temporary hospital to have his wound dressed ; but ere that was achieved he met with an episode that seemed to send all the blood in his body back upon his heart.

'You'll get the V.C. for this, as sure as a gun !' exclaimed Tom Puxleigh, in great glee.

'I think not,' said Douglas modestly ; 'yet I would give half my life for such a decoration !'

'The deuce you would !'

'Yes,' replied Douglas ; 'I am a great dreamer—greater by day than by night, as we all are ; and have you never thought, as a writer says, "How dear to men who have not wealth are colour, sense and sound, and dreams?"—the miraged cities

that only those who travel in long drought behold as compensation.'

CHAPTER LIV.

SCROWLE'S DEN.

WHEN Sir Jahleel came fully to his senses, after the state of unconsciousness in which we left him passed away, he found himself seated in a heavy, old-fashioned mahogany chair, that had seen better days. To the front legs of this his ankles were secured by a cord or rope. Another was passed round his neck, securing him to the back of the chair, and thus—though his arms and hands were free—he was rendered incapable of stooping forward, or using the latter in any way to free himself. An odour of coarse tobacco, stale beer, gin, red herrings and Yarmouth bloaters pervaded the smoky and squalid apartment in which, to his horror and dismay, he found himself. It was low in the ceiling, discoloured by dirt, damp, and age; huge patches of plaster had fallen down in some places, revealing the bare lath or brick wall. It was almost destitute of furniture, and the decayed floor was full of holes, eaten by the rats of a sewer which flowed in its immediate vicinity. All this he could see by the light of a meagre candle that flickered in an iron holder, and the feeble glow of a wretched little fire that burned in a low, rusty grate. Opposite Sir Jahleel sat Joab Scrowle, with his elbows on the table and his chin on his hands, regarding him with a smile of triumph, malignance, and mockery; and with him were two odious and powerful-looking ruffians—one a housebreaker of nearly forty years' experience, as it eventually proved, whose nose had been beaten in, in some conflict with the police probably, and whose face bore a frightful scar; the other was a fellow of the lowest and coarsest costermonger type, who squinted hideously, and wore the dress apparently of a groom. The trio had just divided among them the contents of

their victim's pockets. His gold, silver, and notes had put them in the highest humour. His watch was laid aside for ulterior consideration; his pocket-book was thrown into the fire, that all trace of it might be lost, but a small cheque-book that he usually carried about with him was *not* consigned to the same receptacle. The aspect of Scrowle just then was truly fiendish—tigerish—his thin lips curling upward showed his hideous, yellow, and fang-like teeth; his shaggy eyebrows seemed knit into one; he looked more like a wild beast than an Englishman of the lowest type, and his very eyes seemed to emit a phosphorescent light.

'Allow me to introduce my two friends, Sir Jahleel,' said he, taking off his battered hat, which had a band of crape round it, and making a series of mock bows, 'Sir Jahleel Jermyn, Mr. Pugwash, Mr. Pugwash, Sir Jahleel—Mr. Jemmy Chittling.'

'Glad to make the old gent's acquaintance,' replied the latter, who was minus the nose.

'And what are your friends?' asked Sir Jahleel, somewhat unnecessarily, and with a groan.

'Street muggers—perhaps you know what that is?'

'No,' replied Sir Jahleel, as Scrowle put a finger to his nose and began to wink after his usual fashion.

'How precious green!' snarled Mr. Pugwash.

'Well, it means that muggin is skittles, pocketing a wipe, or doing anything that turns up. They are always on the lookout for any fool that comes, and you came to hand for one, don't you see?' said Scrowle. 'How about your Scotch peerage—my Lord Torthorwald; or Lindenwald, was it? My lord!—oh, my, look at him!' and Scrowle laughed till the tears came into his shift eyes.

'And—my daughter,' said Sir Jahleel, in a low and husky voice; 'where is she?'

'Where?—she knows best.'

'You know nothing of her?'

'Nothing. I spoke of her to lure *you*—it was all a plant.'

'I may thank Heaven for that !

It was almost a relief to his tortured mind to discover that he had been misled, and that Violet was not in that horrible den.

'If not to give me tidings of my daughter, why was I brought here ?

'Why?—oh, crikey !' exclaimed Mr. Pugwash.

'You'll doosed soon find out,' snivelled the individual named Jemmy Chittling through the flattened nostrils of his departed nose.

'Money, I suppose ?

'Precisely—you've hit the right nail on the head,' said Scrowle.

'That's our game, old chap,' added Pugwash, proceeding to light a short pipe. 'So, in all your City experience, on 'Change and elsewhere, you never came across "street muggers" before ?

Sir Jahleel groaned. He certainly had not ; but in his capacity as an alderman and magistrate, he had on two occasions to deal with rogues who, by menaces and cunning, had attempted the same kind of extortion to which he knew now he would, to his cost, be subjected.

'Finding labour and work, and, more than all, want of the "ready" distasteful, after my residence with you at Barons Hall, I have begun to appreciate the community of goods—the equalization of riches, the game of what is yours is mine ! You understand, old fellow ?' said Scrowle, in his mocking way.

The latter felt and knew that he had lost the power to crush and terrify as of old ; but he knew that he could, in another fashion, still scheme and extort for his own behoof.

'And so money is your object ?' said Sir Jahleel, after a pause.

'Yes ; the love of it, I have somewhere read,' said Scrowle, with mock sententiousness, 'is like the hand of death—affecting all alike, both rich and poor ; and the hand of *death* may be devilish near you if you trifle with us in any way, and don't comply with our wishes, my covey.'

Though not disappointed at not finding Violet in such a horrible place, still, amid the rage and fear that possessed him, Sir Jahleel could not help thinking—*where* was she—how

situated—and what doing? Little could he think, or know, or dream!

‘As extortion is your object, what sum do you want?’ he asked.

‘Well, now, I likes that; the old gent is becoming reasonable—that is coming to the pint,’ said Chittling, the noseless man.

‘We have resolved ourselves into a committee of ways and means; we have also considered the ins and outs of the matter; the chances and mischances, before we can mizzle, and you can peach upon us,’ said Scrowle, who loved, by his prolixity, to torment and tantalize; ‘also that we may never have you in our grab again, and so nothing will content us but two thousand a-piece.’

‘Six thousand pounds!’

‘Yes.’

‘It is monstrous!’

‘A tidy sum, ain’t it?’ said Mr. Pugwash, in a tone of high relish, while puffing his short pipe full in their victim’s face.

Sir Jahleel remained silent, and as the three ruffians awaited his consent, they remained silent too, regarding him and each other alternately with some amusement. No sound broke the stillness of the room but the hideous squeaking of a huge bloated sewer rat, which had got wedged between the planks of the rotten and rickety floor, so that it could neither get upward nor downward.

‘Speak, you old buffer,’ exclaimed Chittling, the housebreaker, ‘for if you shilly-shally or trifle with us, I would think no more of polishing you off than I do that ere rat!’ and, suiting the action to the word, he snatched up a rusty poker and smashed the head of the animal to pulp.

He then laughed, for in his odious career of existence cruelty became a positive luxury.

‘Six thousand pounds!’ thought Sir Jahleel; the sum might not excite the surprise of the people at his bank, though the aspect of Scrowle, or one of his two companions, would certainly do so, and if the cashier refused it, his peril still remained.

If he signed it at once, he might at once be destroyed! If he altered the style of his signature, to warn the bank of the trickery, Scrowle would recognise in a moment that he had done so, and would not be deceived, as he was, unluckily, but too familiar with it. Even were the extorted cheque cashed, what then? Would these three wretches release him?—he feared not, but that after they had pocketed their plunder, to save themselves from justice, they might too surely silence his tongue for ever. These thoughts passed swiftly through Sir Jahleel's mind, and he said, with all the courage he could muster—'What if I refuse?'

'Refuse!' cried Chittling hoarsely, with a fearful imprecation; 'look here!'

He lifted up a heavy trap-door in the floor of the room close to the chair in which Sir Jahleel sat, and, while icy terror seemed to paralyze the heart of the latter, he saw the black, fetid, and filthy current of a sewer floating past some feet below—a main sewer that emptied itself into the river.

'Refuse!' said Chittling, fiercely grasping him by the arm, 'and down there you go, as sure as hell yawns for you!'

Sir Jahleel closed his eyes; already in anticipation he felt the cold slime of that awful place closing about him; already he felt the voracious vermin that abode and fattened there swarming round him and tearing him in pieces.

'Shut it up,' said he, in a faint voice, 'and give me a pen and ink.'

'I thought you would be persuaded,' said Scrowle, in high glee, pushing the dirty table towards the chair in which Sir Jahleel was bound, and placing before him the cheque-book filched from his pocket, a pen and some sooty-like ink in a tea-cup.

Slowly, heavily, and as if written with his heart's blood, he filled up the cheque for £6,000, and then by mere force of habit perhaps crossed it. On this Pugwash tore it to shreds savagely.

'Will not that satisfy you?' asked Sir Jahleel, with a moan.

'No!' roared the ruffian, with an oath.

'Why?'

'Ve wants a hopen cheque, payable to bearer or order, you old warmint.'

'Why?'

'Cos my banker might say, this ain't negotiable here.'

'Quick now,' said Chittling; 'or——,' and he laid his hand on the ring of the trap-door.

The pen fell from the fingers of Sir Jahleel, and his eyes closed as his head dropped suddenly forward. The room had seemed to swim round him, and under the effects of the recent blow he had received, and his present emotions, he became insensible.

'The old devil's shamming,' growled Chittling, savagely; 'rouse yourself—yah—r—r!' he added through his clenched teeth, as he took the unconscious man by the throat and shook him brutally.

The door was now made secure to preclude escape or the entrance of unwished-for visitors. By Scrowle's advice Sir Jahleel was unbound, his collar loosened, as he was breathing rather stertorously, and he was laid on the floor in a corner, with a billet of wood under his head and an old rug over him, and the three proceeded to smoke, drink dogsnose, and consider what was to be done next. The night passed—the trio watching by turns—and the following day, and several days and nights passed, during which they were compelled to observe the same duty—for an illness, induced by all he had undergone, and perhaps by the somewhat typhoid atmosphere of the locality in which he was kept concealed, had fallen upon Sir Jahleel, and he was incapable of even signing his name, at least in such a fashion as would satisfy Scrowle. This unforeseen catastrophe enraged and greatly perplexed the trio. The mysterious disappearance of Sir Jahleel was now known over all the City, and thus a cheque written by him would excite instant suspicion unless it was dated some days *before* that disappearance took place.

'The old buffer is more trouble than he is worth,' said Chittling, in a high state of exasperation one morning; 'let us shove him down the sewer, and end the whole thing.'

'Strip him first,' suggested the economical Mr. Pugwash.

'Not yet, not yet,' urged Scrowle; 'he may be worth some chink to us still, even if we find him dead for his friends.'

'Joab is right, by Jingo!' exclaimed Chittling; but Sir Jahleel was in hourly peril, as the temper of his keepers varied, and they were seldom sober now, the contents of his pockets enabling them to lay in a constant supply of coarse gin, adulterated brandy, and beer.

Of these odious liquors, obtained from the nearest public-house, they gave portions occasionally to Sir Jahleel, 'to keep up his pecker,' as they said; and he shuddered with disgust and regret as he thought of Tapleigh's wines, of sparkling hock and iced seltzer; with the never-ending question of what Kate and his friends in Belgravia and his staff in Gresham Street were thinking or doing! Surely inquiries were on foot, and with that conviction came hope; and every footstep he heard in the passage without, he trusted to be that of a policeman or detective. If not rescued, what mercy could he look for; what hope could he have from an appeal to the pity or humanity of wretches such as those three men, whose whole life had been one black career of studied perfidy, war upon society, dishonour and crime, including perhaps murder?

CHAPTER LV.

THE TRAP-DOOR.

To add to the horror of Sir Jahleel's surroundings, the street and den in which he was detained became involved, like all the City, in one of those dense and palpable fogs peculiar to London, when the foul air inhaled by four millions of human beings becomes thickened by smoke, and this served to increase his despondency and aggravate his despair. He could scarcely see, even by day, the four sides of the room in which he sat, secured by a dog's chain to the leg of a table. Overhead the sun was obscured by a dense sky of mist; the atmosphere was leaden,

wet, and melancholy; and monotony, peril, and depression seemed to come home with greater intensity to the miserable man. As the evening of the second day of gloom drew on Sir Jahleel informed Scrowle that he felt sufficiently well to write the required cheque—his hand was steady now, and he hoped that then they would let him be gone; but the trio had other views regarding him now, whether he acceded to their wishes or not. He filled up the slip of paper for the stated sum, leaving it uncrossed, and, by order of Pugwash, dated it three days before the evening of his disappearance, and it was closely and carefully examined and scrutinized by the trio, ere it was, after much mutual suspicion, and much fierce wrangling and bad language (as each wished to become the custodian of the document), consigned to the breast-pocket of Joab Scrowle, who was to undertake to have it cashed on the morrow.

‘You will, I presume, now that your avarice is satisfied, let me go?’ said Sir Jahleel, as Pugwash, the dogstealer, undid the chain that secured him to the rickety table.

‘Let you go, indeed!’ exclaimed that personage, with snarling tone, and showing his teeth like a bull-dog.

‘Not if I knows it, my tulip,’ said Chittling; ‘I ain’t such a blooming fool, for one.’

‘Nor I,’ added Scrowle. ‘Let you away, indeed—to blow the gaff on us all!’

‘What is your object now?’ demanded Sir Jahleel, in a firm tone, gathering strength and even courage from his terror and despair, for cruel and menacing was the expression he read in the bloodshot eyes of these men—an expression that boded nothing less than murder was their purpose!

He was alone, one to three—three wretches without the fear of a future life; without fear in the present, either of God or man, unless the latter came in the form of a constable. For a minute they looked at each other, as if each waited for the other to attempt to do the deed, and they fixed their eyes upon their victim, when suddenly Chittling the housebreaker—a horrible character, the inheritor of a long lineage of shame and evil,

stooped, and with a bang flung open the trap-door that revealed the dark, slimy, and filthy current of the sewer gliding slowly and steadily past below the floor.

'You do not mean this—you cannot mean it!' exclaimed Sir Jahleel, appealing in his horror to Scrowle.

'But we do mean it,' the latter replied, 'and if you haven't squared up your long accounts before, you'll have precious little time to do them now. And from here you go straight to hell—if a hell there be!' added Scrowle, with a fierce mocking laugh.

Sir Jahleel drew near the wall, and as a fierce desire for life possessed him, old and weak though he was, he determined to sell his life dearly, and not to die without an effort. He had been a bit of a bruiser in his youth, and thus fear and rage endued him with a momentary strength, or the sensation of possessing it beyond what he really did, and he fought like a madman when the three human tigers flung themselves upon him, and sought to drag him to the trap-door. By one blow delivered upon the ear he freed himself for a few seconds of Scrowle, but he was feeble in the powerful grasp of the muscular Chittling and wiry Pugwash; and, as he began to feel that all was over, a loud and strangely shrill shriek of despair escaped him, and in fancy he already felt the current of the sewer closing over his bald head, and the rats nibbling at him. The cry was not uttered in vain. In the room above the den of Scrowle, in the hive of criminality occupied by the three, was one whom a run of ill-luck on the turf and at the billiard-table had compelled to share the shelter of famished idleness, or the industry that labours only for guilt and evil; and the cry of Sir Jahleel—one there was no mistaking—reached this man, and he hurried to the rescue. Finding the door of the lower room wherein 'murderous work' was evidently being done secured inside, he dashed it open by one blow of his foot, and just as Sir Jahleel, with what he believed to be his last sigh on his lips, was being dragged helpless to the abyss, a tall, powerful, and commanding-like man seized his arm with one hand, and with the other knocked aside his assailants, one of whom—Joab Scrowle—

fell into the sewer, and a wail of despair escaped him, half choked by the slime in which he was swept away—away to a dreadful death, with the cheque in his pocket ! On beholding a catastrophe so unexpected, on finding the tables turned so completely upon them, the two other conspirators fled, uttering fierce imprecations, while Sir Jahleel, faint, breathless, and scarcely able to speak, could neither explain nor thank the saver of his life for some time.

‘Sir Jahleel Jermyn,’ said the latter in utter astonishment, ‘in the name of heaven, how come you to be here, and under such astounding circumstances ?’

‘You know me, sir,’ said the merchant, looking up.

‘By sight, perfectly.’

It was now Sir Jahleel’s turn to look perplexed, as he thought his protector was his late secretary, Douglas.

‘Mr. Douglas,’ said he faintly—‘Lord Torthorwald !’

‘No; but Lord Torthorwald’s brother,’ replied the other, who was the waif Cospatrick; and the stories of ‘the double ganger,’ and the manner in which Kate had utilized the remarkable mutual resemblance of the two relations flashed upon Sir Jahleel’s memory.

‘I will reward you for this night’s succour,’ said Sir Jahleel, faintly; ‘but let us begone—begone from this ere these ruffians return, perhaps with others, and complete their work. Your arm, sir, please; I can scarcely stand—the street—the street: a cab, a cab !’

By a few scarcely coherent sentences he made Cospatrick Douglas aware, without mentioning Violet’s name, of the trick that had been played him—the snare into which he had fallen.

Weak as a little child now, Sir Jahleel, clinging to the strong arm of the tall and stately Cospatrick, whose sorely dilapidated costume had seen better days, felt as one in a dream when he found himself in the street amid the cold fog of that winter night, which he was never to forget while life lasted.

‘A cab,’ he said hoarsely.

'No wheel vehicle will be found here to-night, I fear, beyond a hot-potato seller's barrow,' said Cospatrick.

All courage and presence of mind had left Sir Jahleel now; and though out in the open street he knew the horrible locality in which it lay, and he trembled at every figure that approached, believing it to be either Pugwash or Chittling, still intent on his life, and encouraged thereto by the fog, that pestilential cloud of smoke which muffled every sound in the street, deadening the rolling of wheels and every other sound, and through which he and Cospatrick threaded their way by the light of shop-fronts and the occasional gleam of a butcher's booth or a public-house. It was a genuine London winter fog, clinging like wet crape to the face, half choking the sufferers from the bronchitis it gave them as they struggled to respire, and making vain the attempts of its asthmatic victims to avoid its effects by smoking herbs or entrenching themselves among high pillows—the atmosphere born of mud, of filth, of smuts and coal grit. At last a cab came crawling slowly and cautiously along, seeking a fare.

Sir Jahleel was assisted in by Cospatrick, who, deeming that his services were no longer required, thought, with a sigh, of returning and groping his way back to the alley off Ratcliff Highway. But it was not to be so.

'Do not leave me yet, Mr. Douglas—do not leave me yet,' urged Sir Jahleel imploringly. 'I feel feeble as an infant. Come home with me—home to Kate!' he added, his request almost ending with a sob.

Then Cospatrick rather reluctantly took a seat by his side, and together they were driven westward, but slowly; and owing to the state of the atmosphere, and the East End cabby's ignorance of the streets they had to traverse, the journey was a very protracted one. As familiar objects could be made out from time to time—the lights in Cornhill, the square mass of the Mansion House, anon St. Paul's, and in time the shops in Piccadilly—Sir Jahleel's confidence became restored and his spirits rose, but Cospatrick could only think, as he said, of 'that unlucky devil in the drain!' He questioned Cospatrick

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as to his brother's movements, but the former could only say that 'he had been down on his luck and knew nothing about them;' thus it was with some surprise the latter learned he had gone to fight in the wars of South Africa.

'Sholto was ever far above me,' said Cospatrick; 'he, so proud, so calm, so good and true, was to me ever a living rebuke. Poor fellow—gone to Boerland! I wonder what he is doing now—he, the penniless Lord Torthorwald! Why did he leave you, Sir Jahleel? he seemed happy enough in your temporary employment,' said Cospatrick after a pause; but his companion evaded the question by asking another.

'How do you live; what has been your past resource—your income?'

'The Board of Green Cloth,' said Cospatrick, with a bitter laugh.

'You mean play!'

'Yes.'

'Bad—bad,' said Sir Jahleel, shaking his head; 'if I gave you a thousand pounds, I suppose they would fly in a week?'

'Perhaps—and yet perhaps not, Sir Jahleel; those who look forward see one way, those who look back see many; and I can now look back and see many.'

'Glad to hear it—very glad to hear it!'

They sat silent as the cab passed Apsley House, and turned down towards Belgravia.

'Home—here we are, at home!' exclaimed Sir Jahleel, looking up at the now partially lighted windows of his stately mansion, as the cab drew up before its pillared porch, and they alighted—Cospatrick thinking of his miserable costume and the household he would probably have to face.

Leaving the astonished and joyous Tapleigh to settle the fare, Sir Jahleel, followed by Cospatrick, proceeded straight to the drawing-room, where, he was told, Kate was seated in sorrow, and now confirmed fear, with Dolly and Vincent Sheldon.

'Papa—papa!' cried his golden-haired fairy, with a voice between a shriek and a sob, as she threw her arms round his neck, and became quite hysterical, an emotion in which Kate

each other's eyes in bewildered silence, and both as if half suffocated with their mutual emotions. It was Douglas she looked on at last—the same Douglas she had learned to love, and loved still. His face was less calm than usual then, but expressive of thought and gravity; the lines of the mouth musing, and a little disdainful by recent habit; the eyes dark and penetrating; the familiar knit in the brow, fast smoothing out, as she gazed on him, and the clasp of their hands tightened. Violet's silent vow had been that she would join the Red Cross Nurses, and seek him out—a wild and perilous scheme, as Douglas thought. So Violet was the lost or missing daughter of Sir Jahleel referred to in the bewildering newspaper paragraph. What *did* it all mean? Poor Violet had known nothing of what was before her, in the way of personal toil, suffering, and exposure, beyond her delicate strength, and great indeed was her horror of the scenes she witnessed—scenes that made her heart die within her; and great had been her repugnance of them; but she had cast her lot with women who, if their humanity and tenderness were great, had, perhaps, less refinement or stronger nerves, and she had to go through the task she had taken upon her—the fulfilment of her silent vow, in the hope of finding or meeting Douglas, and clearing herself of that supposed cruelty and faithlessness of which she felt certain he must be accusing her. Home, perhaps, she would ere this have gone at all hazards; but in this guise and with this intent she had followed him to the land of peril, and to the bitter end she had resolved to follow out her purpose. It was her first impulse, and she acted upon it—a wild and quixotic one, the reader may think, and that a letter might have served the same end; but she knew not where, to what camp, corps, or even in what name to address it; thus it seemed that she could but go where he had gone and inquire in person. More than once had she read to the poor wounded and dying when she haunted the hospital in terror of seeing him among them; and she had prayed by their pallets, too, and on more than one occasion found that she had continued to do so to ears that would hear

her no more, for with her soft voice as the last sound in them, the sufferers had passed away. She had miscalculated her strength, we say, to endure the daily toils and horrors of the Boer War. As she came up-country she could hear no tidings of Douglas, as he was not attached to any corps, imperial or colonial; and in hopelessness she had once been beginning to think of making her way home when she incidentally heard a soldier speak of a Douglas who was serving as a mere trooper in the Diamond Fields Horse.

Violet was the first to speak, for she had expected to meet Douglas in this distant land, though such a possibility would never have occurred to *him*.

‘Oh, Sholto!’

No eye was upon them, and he drew her to his breast.

‘Violet, what mystery—what madness is this? What brought you to this frightful country, and in that costume—you so delicate, so gently bred and tenderly nurtured, to engage in such perilous and repulsive work?’

‘I came to seek you,’ she replied simply, while her colour deepened.

‘Me?’

‘You, Sholto!’

‘And having found me?’

‘I shall endeavour to lure you home, when I have explained the trick of which you were made the victim.’

‘There is a story then to tell?’

‘Yes,’ replied Violet, as she sobbed, and a shower of tears escaped her; and he led her to a seat under the shelter of a great quince hedge, and strove to soothe her.

‘How knew you that I was here?’ he asked.

‘By your letter to dear Vincent Sheldon.’

‘And you actually came round half the world, you, so highly bred, so wealthy——’

‘Oh, do not speak of wealth! I came in search of you—to explain—to ease my heart.’

‘My own sweet Violet!’

'Oh, Douglas—Sholto, I am unlike most women, I fear.'

'In loveliness you are !'

'Not that—I mean that few would dare to do as I have done—come here in search of you, and openly avow it, at the terrible risk of being deemed, in doing so, unmaidenly.'

'Unmaidenly, my dearest Violet ! You are, indeed, a true woman, neither less nor more—your highest compliment ; excellent in beauty and essentially feminine !' he exclaimed, gazing upon her with ardour.

She had felt, she was conscious, a sense of terror and remorse mingling with her indignation when she left her home—vague terror of all that might be before her, and some remorse for what her family must suffer.

'It was a wrench,' she said, 'to tear myself away from home and from my sisters.'

'But life is full of wrenches.'

'And I loved you, who had been so deeply wronged ; and papa, poor man, in all his calculations, forgot to reckon a woman's resolution.'

'And a woman's love, darling !'

At the reference to Sir Jahleel there rose to his lips a question concerning the alarming paragraph ; but he repressed his curiosity, lest the inquiry might prematurely shock and distress her, so he asked instead : 'And how are Kate—the haughty Kate—and happy little Dolly ?'

'I know not—I have not heard,' she answered softly, as with the homely sound of their names there came a rush of countless memories—the ties of infancy, of girlhood, of school-days, and her father's house at Barons Hall or Belgravia.

'But now that you are more composed, Violet, tell me about the engagement-ring, and why you returned it to me without a word of explanation.'

After a pause, with downcast eyes and heaving heart, she told him all about the scene on the Marine Parade ; how Kate, though aware that the gentleman in the boat was not him, had succeeded in deceiving her ; how she had met Cospatrick in the

train, then learning for the first time the fact of his existence and the marvellous likeness; and how she hurried to their house in London, hoping to find him at his desk, but only to learn that he had been at last dismissed, and had gone, none knew whither, without money, friends, or profession, into the cold, wide world!

'Ah, poor Cospatrick! he has unwittingly brought me into many a scrape, and occasioned me much mortification, but this has been the most bitter of all.'

'Till now.'

'Till now, my love. But,' he added, with reference to his own concealed rank, and much more than the reader knows, 'did Cospatrick tell you—say anything *else* about me and himself?'

'Else—he only praised you greatly, and took some blame to himself in the past, I think.'

'Poor wastrel!'

'It is difficult, I dare say, for men of the world to keep always in the right way.'

'We have, it is said, "our guardian angel," it is true, who tries to keep us in the straight and narrow path; but for one angel there are *twenty* imps, who tug at our good resolutions, and generally with the greatest success.'

'And has it been so with Cospatrick?'

'Yes, Violet.'

'I thought, Sholto,' said she, recurring again to the subject that was uppermost in her thoughts, 'that you would deem me one who had misled you, only through a spirit of coquetry and the desire to lure, to triumph, and then to mock and wound one who I knew was poor, and—and—papa's dependent; and my heart died within me at the thought of being viewed so by you, when I am of a nature so different—by you, whom I loved better than myself—better than the whole world!' she ended in a whisper, with her face nestling on his shoulder in a fashion and pose that the lady matron of the Red Cross Nurses would rather have resented had she seen it.

CHAPTER LVII.

'TENDER AND TRUE.'

'WELL, darling,' said Douglas, with a fond smile, 'you were very determined to lift off my poor heart the load you so unwittingly laid upon it; but where there is a will, there is a way—especially with a woman.'

'Ah—you are thinking of the epilogue to the Zara of Aaron Hill,' replied Violet, laughing now:—

"First, then, a woman will, or won't, depend on't;
If she will do't she will, and there's an end on't;
But if she won't, since safe and sound your trust is,
Fear is affront, and jealousy injustice."

'Ah, how wicked I was, Sholto,' said Violet, after a pause, 'to adopt that false idea so easily!'

'My love,' said he tenderly, 'what matters it now?'

'But Cospatrick's resemblance to you is marvellous.'

'And rather unfortunate—to me, at least.'

'How cruel of papa to discard you—so abruptly, too.'

Her tear-laden eyes were bent on his.

'Oh, how happy, happy I am that I have found you,' she exclaimed.

A beautiful expression shone in his dark eyes as they continued to gaze into hers with old familiar tenderness. Pardon and passion, with the great sweetness of a new love, were there.

They were now together, and as they mutually felt, so far away from their former life and the old world—so far away from all. And how strange it now seemed to Douglas. He had been learning of late—yea, schooling himself to hate, not her, but his futile love for her. All that had sanctified and rendered it pure and holy in the past departed when she returned him his ring, and he deemed her false, fickle, and changeable. And

now, recalling the times when he had played caressingly with her hair, with her hands, or when his lips had lightly touched her white eyelids or cheek, he felt only wroth at himself for the terrible delusions which he had begun to foster. Now all was explained ; she was his own, as she had ever been. Could he doubt it after all she had done, relinquished, and undergone ? He drew her with unconscious passion to his breast ; loosed her from the embrace to survey her at arms' length, only to draw her close to him again, and cover her face with kisses. How her whole heart went out to him, in contrition and tenderness. She felt purer, better, braver now, though Violet was ever pure and simple. She had but one thought.

'Together—together—he and I—in this strange land !'

He was now to her country, parentage, family, and home. In his extreme diffidence and the modesty of his nature, he felt that he was scarcely worthy of the purity and love-passion of Violet, who, ignorant of what and who he really was, and knew himself to be, asked for nothing but his love in return—nothing for itself, but gave all to him.

'Papa,' she began and paused.

'I know how he and Kate viewed me ; but only as all the world would do,' said he ; ' could I—one of the poorest of men in the British Isles—aspire to offering my hand to you, without being deemed a trickster and fortune-hunter ?'

'Yet you gave me your heart, Sholto.'

'Could I help doing so ?'

'But neither papa nor Kate, when they hear of our little romance in South Africa, can taunt you or mistake you, and dear papa,' she added coyly, with a silvery laugh, ' will be glad to make terms with us, to get me back again.'

And this delicate, beautiful, and accomplished girl, to whom her home life had been perfect, with the round of pleasure, vanity, and luxury and ease that wealth procured her, had cast all aside for his sake, and, forgetting self, pride, and the perils of exposure, had followed him to this land, and these scenes of utter barbarism, was the ever present thought of Douglas. That she—in ignorance

as he knew she must be of the secret of his rank (which might have inflamed a girl's vanity)—had done all this for him, filled his heart with pride and gladness—with tenderness, gratitude, and a passionate thankfulness. Still he did not, unfortunately, as it eventually proved, undeceive her by the knowledge that he was the Lord Torthorwald, and smiled as he fancied her wonder when the revelation came.

'But yesterday,' said she, as her white fingers strayed caressingly through his thick dark hair, 'I heard a soldier say something to another that must have referred to you.'

'And this something, Violet?'

"He is a noble spirit, this unknown volunteer, who seems to fight here for fighting's sake, and is greatly loved by all our fellows."

"Why?" asked the other.

"Because he is so gentle in manner, and so generous with his purse—so proud and so manly!" And then—and then—I thought he must refer to you, my own Douglas, "tender and true," and my heart leaped in my breast; but oh, I had a great terror once!

'And that terror, dearest?'

'Was this. When coming up country from Durban, with the other lady nurses, in the ambulance waggons, we stopped at a place called Windvogel, and there, at a Dutch inn called the Heerenlogement——'

'I know the place—kept by Jan van Beer, a Fleming.'

'Yes—well then, a sad story was told us of a young Englander at the Diamond Fields, one who was tall and dark, and handsome in appearance, well-bred, and all unused to such rough and terrible lives as the people lead there beyond the Drakenberg; and who had set up his home amid the camp in the wilderness. Who he was, or whence he came, no one knew; the occasional post never brought any letters or papers for him, nor did he ever seem to expect any, and he addressed none home. He was ever suave, polite, and pleasant to all, and for all he had a kindly word. He always worked hard, but without hope and with-

out success, and his heart seemed broken. Then he disappeared; days passed on, and he was seen by none of the diggers, who were all intent on their own affairs and occupied by their own work—searching for diamonds. At last, one of these adventurers entered the tent of the stranger and found him stretched on a straw pallet dead! He had shot himself (though no one had heard the report of the pistol), and near him lay a little heap of burned letters and papers, and a wallet containing a few necessaries, from all of which the name and initials had been effaced. One hand held, crushed up in its death grasp, the photo of a girl—perhaps of her for whom he had come hither to seek the fortune they fondly hoped to share together; but it gave no clue, as the name and address of the artist had been erased. He had destroyed everything, but evidently had not the heart to destroy this last relic of the girl he had loved. So not a clue remained to this poor fellow's identity. By order of the *Veldkornet* he was interred where he was found, the diggers standing bare-headed round his grave, and there, his story buried with him, he lies alone in the wilderness, far, far from the English home where some fond heart may be waiting, watching, and mourning for him—counting the days of his absence and expected return. I shall never forget,' added Violet, with her gentle eyes full of tears, 'the horror this story, as translated from the *Volksteem*, or *Transvaal Gazette*, gave me!'

'Why, Violet?'

'Because—because—I feared this unknown might be—you.'

'Me?'

'You, Sholto; and Heaven alone knows all that terror cost me—the terror of a secret I could never unravel.'

The returned ring with the words 'Forget me not,' and the quaint legend '*Lock Sicker*,' was again placed upon her finger—'soon,' as Douglas said, to be replaced by another of a plainer kind; and then, in that remote part of the world, as she lay with her head on his breast and his arm round her, it seemed to both that the tie so suddenly renewed by both was dearer, stronger, and more indissoluble than ever.

How delicious it was for both—for Violet especially—to go back through the chequered history of their early love ; and for her to question him as to the growth of his affection, though shy to make acknowledgments of the growth of her own ; delicious now that they were together ; and the future (they were content to blink monetary considerations) seemed as secure as any human chance can be ; delicious and child-like to recall the time when, as yet strangers to each other, or nearly so, eye began to seek eye, and thought to mingle with thought, till their hearts beat in unison, and hands sought each other secretly, clingingly and tenderly. So they sat and dreamed on, all unaware that an armed Boer was lurking near them behind the green hedge, or rather amid the masses of it, in which for the purpose of espionage he had concealed himself, and there he was watching and listening. This Boer was Hans Swartboy. So Hans had not yet been killed anywhere ; and as he surveyed Douglas his pale grey eyes sparkled with malice, resentment, and revenge.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE.

EVENTS—so far as Douglas and Violet were concerned—were fated to follow each other with startling rapidity now. Dear though her presence was to him, and enchanting though her society, Douglas had but one anxiety now—to get her in safety down country to Durban. Her avocation of nurse filled him with dismay, and Newcastle was so close to the Boer outposts and position as to be a place of daily peril, and Violet was perfectly conscious that, though her pilgrimage had proved successful, that she had found him and explained all, she could not remain much in his society situated as they were. Douglas

knew that there was to be a secret movement made to the front that night, aiming at nothing less than the capture of the famous, yet fatal, Hill of Majuba. He had promised to accompany the General's staff, but kept Violet in partial ignorance of the actual risks he would have to encounter.

'A movement to the front, you say, Sholto ?' she exclaimed, growing deadly pale, 'and you mean to go !'

'Yes.'

'Oh, why ?'

'Honour compels me, Violet ; to turn now would ill become the—the name I inherit.'

'Sholto ! Sholto !' said she, with hands clasped, 'why thus risk your life and my happiness—nay, it may be my life, too ? You have no place, post, or appointment in the army here, so why go into action again ?'

'I have some such thing to win, or what must be our—my resource ? and remember honour, darling, honour ! Many know me here now, darling, though they know me not,' he added, with a little hauteur. 'I must—I must go ; and Heaven will protect me for your sake, if not for my own.'

He was in the act of beseeching her to quit her avocation of nurse, and, on the plea of illness, to remain at an hotel with the senior nurse or matron whom she had accompanied on this wild expedition—one as wild and romantic as that which the mother of Thomas a' Becket undertook when she came from Palestine to London in search of her crusading lover—when a messenger came from the Quartermaster-General saying that he wished 'to ask Mr. Douglas some questions as to the nature of the ground he had gone over in the recent reconnaissance,' and he was reluctantly compelled to leave her without any plan being arranged for the future, save that he would find her in the hospital parlour, or the apartment which passed for such, on his return. He rode off to Fort Amiel, and Violet watched his retreating figure from a window as long as it was in sight. For a time she remained sunk in reverie. Thoughts that were natural, and suggested by the whole of her peculiar situation—

in its tone and tenor; but, truth to tell, poor Violet scarcely knew what she was committing to paper when she wrote it. He prosecuted a few inquiries in the hospital among the other lady nurses, and from one ascertained beyond a doubt that, averring she had tidings that required her immediate departure for England, she had packed up a few things and left the place without bidding farewell to any one, looking pale, harassed, and ill.

‘How long ago?’ asked Douglas.

‘About two hours.’

He knew that this was soon after he left her. Oh, why had he lingered so long at Fort Amiel? In two hours whither might she have been taken, and in such custody as that of Hans Swartboy what horrors might have happened! He sat in his saddle erect, yet stunned, as men have been known to do for a second after being pierced by the shot that slew them. Reunited, she seemed to have become more than ever a desire, a necessity to him and his existence. He looked at the nurse to whom he spoke with eyes that seemed blind, while his dark face was pale as with the pallor of death; and then, putting spurs to his horse, he left Newcastle, and galloped madly along the road that led to Fort Lucas. He could trace the ruts of many waggon wheels, but looked in vain for the vehicle in which he hoped to overtake her. The ten miles or so that lie between Newcastle and Fort Lucas were soon spanned by him. He met no one of whom he could make inquiries. The country seemed desolate, and he passed no living thing save a great cock ostrich wading in the Horn river, as he forded it in hot haste and then turned a little eastward to Fort Lucas and its little cluster of huts. No waggon was there, and he was assured by those he questioned in bitter anxiety that no waggon had approached the place, or been seen even near it, during the entire day. He wheeled his horse round, and rode back as furiously as he had come. If not in Newcastle, as she might yet perhaps be, she was the victim of some horrible treachery.

‘Oh, Violet—Violet!’ he murmured to himself as he rode on,

and there were unutterable tenderness and desolation in his voice, as he unconsciously uttered her name—both born of the intensity of one dominant emotion.

Evening was closing, when, after prosecuting every possible inquiry at the little town of Newcastle, he was compelled to conclude that she was no longer there; and that she was gone—gone and in the hands of Hans Swartboy, for her letter left no doubt about that! He felt that now he had lost her again—lost her as suddenly as she had been found; but had lost her as surely and finally as if he had seen her laid down in the grave. In his heart, terror and horror mingled with a great anguish. He felt himself to be the cause of her destruction; and now his head, always so gallant and erect, was sunk forward, with his chin upon his breast, and his heart was heavy as lead within him. Even another letter, which was now put in his hands by Tom Puxleigh, who had been entrusted with the delivery of it by the General, failed to rouse him from his stupor; but mechanically he opened and read it, while standing beside his horse and clinging in faintness to a stirrup-leather. It proved to be from Mr. John Charters, and had been that morning brought up-country by the post-cart, which narrowly escaped capture by the Boers, and briefly informed him that a remote, almost forgotten, kinsman had died in India, and that by his demise he was now the heir to a princely fortune!

‘Come home, you foolish boy, at once, and leave this quixotic and wandering life to which you have betaken yourself,’ wrote the old gentleman; ‘come home, I say, and resume your title and your own place in society. I enclose a letter of credit on the Durban Bank for five hundred pounds, for contingent expenses; and for the third time I repeat, for God’s sake act like a lad of sense, and come home, my lord!’

‘Of what value is this money—this fortune—to me *now*?’ he exclaimed, with his eyes full of tears, and all heedless that Tom Puxleigh stood by observing him with friendly intent. ‘How long have I been moneyless, homeless, almost friendless, and

now, this turn in the wheel of fortune—this lucky spoke—comes uppermost. Why did it not come to pass when I was the poor private secretary in that upper room in Belgravia? Violet, Violet, where are you?

Aye—where? Her father, when in the den we have described in Ratcliff Highway, was not in greater peril.

CHAPTER LIX.

DAYS THAT ARE OVER—DREAMS THAT ARE DONE.

WHILE Violet was sitting in fond, happy, and silent reverie, as we last left her in the little parlour of the temporary hospital awaiting the return of Douglas, a staff officer in undress uniform entered, and, bowing low, asked her if the volunteer known as Mr. Douglas was about the premises, as it was understood at headquarters that he had come thither to get a wound dressed; and while speaking, cap in hand, he seemed to be greatly impressed by the rare beauty and refined appearance of the girl he addressed, and these were points which her plain and somewhat demure fashion of costume could neither mar nor conceal.

Ere Violet could reply the officer resumed: 'He seems quite the hero of a very romantic story. It seems that he is a peer of the realm, who for some freak has chosen to conceal his rank and pass himself off as a commoner, though he is actually Lord Carlyle and Torthorwald.'

'Sir!' exclaimed Violet, in utter bewilderment, and scarcely understanding that she heard aright, 'he the Lord Torthorwald!'

'So it seems,' replied the aide-de-camp, twirling his moustache, and eyeing her very approvingly and appreciatively. 'An old legal gentleman in Scotland, a Mr. John Charters—yes, that is the name—has written to the General commanding here, saying that his client, the Lord Torthorwald, has for long past, for

reasons of his own, relinquished his rank and title, and gone about under his family name of Douglas ; but now that certain events have transpired at home, his presence there is imperatively required ; that he must return at once ; and that he looks to the General to use all his influence to make him quit an army in which no place is as yet assigned him. I am here with that, I think, most welcome message, and would wish to see him.'

Violet made no reply—her voice was gone.

'He was wounded,' resumed the officer; 'are you nursing him?'

'No,' replied Violet faintly ; 'but he will soon be back here. Leave your message with me.'

'Thanks—very much,' replied the staff officer, as he rather lingeringly bowed himself out.

Violet could not respond, even mechanically, while the officer departed in surprise at her agitation and the white pallor of her quivering lips.

'Torthorwald!' she muttered, with strangely mingled emotions of sorrow and delight—delight and tenderness ; but quickly the delight died away, as with a sudden pang of sharp pain and shame she thought of the sordid misconstruction that might be put—nay, that he already in his secret heart perhaps was putting—upon her own recent movements. And yet, she thought, by no word or action had he betrayed the least suspicion that he was doing so ; but, in all her love, she felt that she was desolate again !

Thick and fast came her terrible thoughts. Already an age seemed to have elapsed since her reunion with Douglas that morning, and his kiss was on her cheek ; and now she must think of him as the Lord Torthorwald—he, the poor private secretary, who had been the object of Kate's anger, spite, and contempt. She had seen many a peer who looked more like a groom or a cabman ; but now the dignity of manner, that proud yet gentle expression of eye, that purity of accent and careless grace of movement, which had impressed her and others, seemed to be fully accounted for.

'And he has been all this time the Lord Torthorwald, whose

title poor papa was fondly following like an *ignis fatuus* ! How he must have laughed at us all and our pretensions, and how he must despise me ! Oh, heaven—how strangely things work in this world !

A thousand circumstances, casual remarks the meaning of which had puzzled her at the time, all rushed upon her memory now ; Douglas's interest in, and intimate knowledge of, the Thorwald family, their legends, history, intermarriages, and their old castle on the green braes above Lockerbie. She saw it all distinctly now !

‘He will think I have become aware of all this, and have followed him here in consequence. Oh, my God, that he should think so !’ she muttered in great bitterness of spirit. ‘I have lost dignity in his eyes—purity, truth, too—I, who for him have risked all—perhaps lost all ! Oh, it is hard—very, very hard,’ she continued, as her bitter and blinding tears fell fast. ‘I cannot undeceive him, and he shall never know how I learned this secret, and *why* I have left him, as leave him I shall.’

A blush of the deepest shame crimsoned the soft cheeks of Violet at the idea of all her fevered fancy pictured ; then she became deathly pale, and wrung her hands.

‘Heavens—oh, heavens ! What must he think—have thought of me ?’ was the question that occurred to her in endless iteration ; ‘what but that, having discovered his rank and position, I have followed him, even here, to this remote and perilous part of the world, to regain by art and cunning the love I had cast away ; to regain it also by an affectation of innocent tenderness, of humanity, and even of religion ; to claim the sweetness of old kisses from lips that might perhaps have forgotten mine ! Follow him I did, because I thought him poorer, humbler than myself, and that I could explain all, and then lay my head on his heart, and place my hand confidingly in his with a noble dowry—if papa relented, and so willed it. Fool—fool that I have been ; it has all come to this ; and I must away—away, and never see him more !’

Her slender white throat swelled ; she felt as if it would be a

relief to scream, and for some moments she dropped on a seat, in doubt whether she were awake or dreaming, as a vague and undefined dread of still greater calamity came over her. Through it all she felt a sense of intense humiliation—of passionate shame, that seemed to scorch up her heart, for she was, as we have said, a proud girl. Thus poor Violet cowered down ; she buried her sweet face in her delicate hands, and felt her heart-sickness increase with every moment, and with it her sense of a most unmerited false position. In her unrest of spirit, and, for a time, her feverish, infirmity of purpose, she marvelled, with what Ouida calls the dreamy wonder 'that comes on us all, when, having chosen *one* path, we inquire whither the other would have led.'

Had she never followed Lord Torthorwald—or plain Douglas as she then knew him to be—would he ever have come back to her, or would an explanation have come to pass? He knew that he was Lord Torthorwald while acting as her father's secretary ; yet no letter ever came to him addressed so, and he gave no sign that he possessed this rank, for which her father would freely have bestowed her upon him. For a short space she sat motionless and breathless—her lips parched and moistened only by her tears, her brow and heart throbbing, her eyes fixed dreamily on Fort Amiel and the distant range of the Drakenberg with all its flat-topped mountains ; yet she saw them not ; her eyes seemed to look far beyond them, into infinity. Her face, though she knew it not, had a rigid, hopeless, and worn expression in it, as of one who had struggled and conquered, but had lost again. The great power of loving in Violet was only equalled by her pride ; thus she had resolved—awful though the wrench to her heart, so lately filled with glorious hope—never to see him more ! They had met again but to be parted ; she had re-won him but again to lose him, and with a battle in immediate prospect !

'Through the desolation of the world,' she thought, 'I have sought, only to find him in vain. He shall never—can never know all,' she muttered, with her white tremulous lips, 'never

know how purely and truly I loved him, and why I came hither amid these awful scenes. Yet he will misconstrue all. Oh, God help me ! God help me ! He at least knows the truth, and how guileless I have been—how tender and true, like a Douglas of old !

Then, for the second time in life—though inspired by very different motives—she determined to avoid the presence of the only man she ever loved. She felt that away from that place she must get without delay, if possible before Douglas returned—away by the post-cart, or waggon, or otherwise, for Pietermaritzburg and Durban ; and she would write, with her farewell, her reasons for doing so. Several ladies, the wives and, in some sad instances, the widows, of officers, were at these towns on their way home to Europe, as she knew, and she would go homeward over the sea with them. As the sun was verging to its time of dipping behind the range of the Drakenberg, she wandered away from the vicinity of the hospital vaguely, but in search of a vehicle or means of conveyance from Newcastle westward, and she quickly detected an armed Boer—but all Boers were armed—talking to an Africander boy, whose long whip showed him to be the *vorelooper* or driver of a waggon. She asked him if he was about to travel, and which way. Ere the boy could reply, the Boer, who was Hans Swartboy, said : ‘ He is the driver of my waggon—which way do you wish to travel ? ’

‘ At least as far as Fort Lucas, on the Pietermaritzburg road. Will you take me ? ’ she asked pleadingly.

‘ Yes—if—— ’

‘ I can pay you well. ’

‘ Very good, ’ replied Hans, whose strange dialect we do not attempt to put on paper, and recognising her, as he did, as the lady he had seen with Douglas, his fierce heart glowed with joy at the vengeance he would, through her, inflict on the latter.

‘ And where is your waggon ? ’ she asked.

‘ Behind yonder clump of thornwood trees. In less than ten minutes I must inspan and trek. ’

He then told her who he was, but urged her to say nothing on the subject to Douglas—needless advice so far as she was concerned; but she promised.

‘Wait for me; I shall be in time,’ said Violet, with a gasp in her throat; and placing a sovereign in his hand, she hurried back to the hospital, packed a few things in hot and nervous haste, wrote the note which Douglas read with such wonder and pain, assumed her travelling-cloak and hood, and quitting again that place of suffering, hastened to the thornwood trees, where stood a little covered waggon, drawn by two small country oxen, and there she was instantly met by Hans, who took his long meerschaum from his mouth and greeted her with a grin that expressed, like his horrid and cruel eyes, a vast deal that never occurred to her in the pre-occupation of her mind.

She knew not that the hand which grasped her delicate wrist as she was assisted into the waggon was the hand of one of the *Tronkvolk*, blackened by numerous crimes and red with murder’s work; or that another Boer, who sat smoking in the back part of the waggon, and whose face was terribly disfigured by a scar—a sword-cut, that had severed his upper lip—was Enoch Heemskirk, whom Douglas had first met in the farm of Lust and Rust. She muffled her head in her hood, to conceal alike her face and her tears, and took no heed of the route pursued by her companions, which, we need scarcely inform the reader, was *not* towards Fort Lucas. And now a greater horror fell upon her as a new and, in the excitement of her pilgrimage, hitherto unthought-of reflection occurred to her mind.

‘I have to go home now—home to papa and Kate, at Barons Court or London. How shall I account for my absence—how explain, not to them, but to the world, the hard, bitter, and censorious world, the cause of my flight? What may not have been said, what thought, of what may I not be suspected and accused?’

For Violet knew that the whole situation in which she had placed herself was liable to the most cruel and dark misconception; and that, as a writer says, ‘a girl’s name is like a

peach—the down once brushed off, the fruit leaves the trace of the rough handling for ever.’

‘Alas!’ she thought, as the waggon jolted onwards—‘alas, for the days that are over, the dreams that are done!’

Hans and Enoch smoked their pipes in silence, but smiled to each other covertly from time to time, for they had their own thoughts and views; while the waggon, which had left the main road now, was pursuing a path that led *not* eastward but westward among the lonely mountains, and, in the utter abstraction of her thoughts, poor Violet took no note of this circumstance.

CHAPTER LX.

THE FATAL HILL.

NIGHT had closed over the range of the Drakenberg—a gloomy night, when scarcely a star was reflected in the currents of the Ingogo and Buffalo rivers; when our troops, to the number of only three hundred men of the 58th, or Rutlandshire, the 60th Rifles, and the grand old Gordon Highlanders (fresh from Afghanistan and the victories of Roberts), with a few of the Naval Brigade under Commander Romilly, began their march, to take, and if possible keep, the hill of Majuba, which commanded and enfiladed the whole position of the Boers—a task that would have required at least three thousand bayonets. We are not about to detail much of those sad and calamitous events with which the reader is now familiar, but simply to state the part that ‘our hero,’ to use the novelist’s phrase of twenty years ago, Douglas, or Lord Torthorwald, bore therein.

Douglas, as we shall still call him, marched on foot, with his sword and revolver, keeping with the staff, to be of service in any way he might, and Tom Puxleigh, who had left his horse in the camp as useless, considering the ground to be traversed, was by his side, and his gravity of demeanour, his almost total silence, perplexed the usually hilarious and loquacious Tom in

no small degree, and the latter feared that his friend was possessed by that fatal fancy peculiar to some men when going into action, that they are certainly doomed to fall. Douglas had lately had heavy thoughts, and desperate ones too. All his money was gone, the last of it spent among the wounded. Mr. Charters's letter had removed all monetary difficulties, but his despair was now unutterable. Honour compelled him to march on this night; but in his soul he cursed the contingency and necessity with reference thereto, that brought them on that midnight expedition instead of searching for *her*; but where, in what direction, and with whom was he to search on the morrow? for that he should quit the troops, honour or no honour, on the morrow he was resolved, and devote himself to the duty of discovering Violet—and too probably of avenging her! The morrow! Oh, when in such awful, unscrupulous, and butcherly hands, what might not have happened to her by that time!

'Your presence here is rash and unnecessary,' said Tom Puxleigh, who felt sorrow for Douglas, yet had not the least doubt of his high spirit and lofty courage; 'are you determined to cast your lot with us to-night?'

'Yes,' said Douglas, through his clenched teeth. 'Yes, Tom, to the bitter end.'

The night grew darker, and as the march was across a rough and unknown country it was toilsome in the extreme to the soldiers, who were all in heavy marching order, with three days' provisions per man in their havresacks, with their water-bottles and eighty rounds of ammunition; and at the foot of the main ridge of the mountains the chief difficulties began, under the guidance of some Zulus. The figures of the soldiers looked sombre amid the gloom; the white helmets had all been dyed brown now, and the white gaiters of the little party of Highlanders came curiously out amid the obscurity as the ascent of the hill began.

'Come on, lads, we shall soon reach the top,' cried the officers cheerily from time to time; but in many places the ascents were absolutely precipitous, and the footsteps of the climbers in front

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shrieks and cries of the falling—his spirit never rose ; but a dull and dogged despair oppressed him. He had but one ever-present thought—Violet ! Like the rest of our soldiers, he mechanically kept well under cover, and only raised his head to take an occasional shot when a Boer's hat appeared ; and often at the same moment a bullet grazed his helmet, thus showing that he too was marked. He was roused for a time from his own great mental misery, when a ball passed through the helmet and brain of poor Tom Puxleigh, who knelt by his side, and who expired without a sigh. Douglas looked for a moment at the once heedless, handsome, and joyous boy—for he was little more—lying thus stiffening in his braided patrol jacket, and with his blood trickling among the rocks ; and then he turned towards the lurking Boer, from whose rifle the fatal shot had assuredly come. Lying close to the earth, with his field-glass pushed through some *speckboom*, he could see the very face of the Boer, as he raised it for a moment to fire again. He was Erasmus, whom he had met with Van Bloom at Windvogel, and who with others had attempted the assassination of poor Puxleigh and himself at the ford of the Ingogo river. He took off his helmet, and placing it conspicuously to draw the fire of Erasmus, shot him through the head the moment he raised it ; and he beheld without compunction the body of the slain man roll down the steep and disappear.

Closer and closer came the overwhelming masses of the Boers, every one of their bullets telling with terrible effect ; and fatally and surely all our men whom they hit were wounded in the head, and fell to rise no more. Commander Romilly was mortally wounded at the head of his little band of blue jackets from H.M.S. *Boadicea*, by an explosive bullet, as current rumour asserted. All our men fought well and valiantly, but none excelled twenty men of the Gordon Highlanders, under Lieutenant Hamilton, who held the point most threatened by the Boers with a stern valour which, as Napier said of the same regiment at the Pyrenees, 'would have graced the pass of Thermopylæ.'

By noon the Boers had powerfully reinforced their fighting line of concealed skirmishers, and at one, with loud, hoarse yells of triumph and exultation, they made a tremendous and simultaneous rush, by which the whole of our advanced line was shot down or beaten back towards the hollow basin which formed the plateau of the hill, and round the rim of which our whole force had stood with bayonets fixed to repel the assault. Fast fell on every side the men of the Rutlandshire, the dark Riflemen, the Gordon Highlanders, in their tartans, frayed and faded in the wars of India ; and the air seemed literally alive with bullets. Once more the Boers made a tremendous rush : with fierce shouts and a storm of fire, they burst through the gathered handful, at a moment when the confusion and the mingled din of sounds were truly infernal, and, driving back the defenders of the hill, the position was taken, and all was lost ! At first there was a wild rush made by our surviving few to rally—the natural impulse of British soldiers ; but, alas ! the next was to fly in confusion and dismay. Swept away in the rearward rush, a ball broke the left thigh bone of Douglas above the knee, and he fell heavily on his face. His first thought was, who would succour Violet now ? He strove to struggle up—to crawl onward, but in vain ; he was trod under foot by the swarm of heavily-booted Boers, who now swept in wild triumph over the whole plateau, firing at the fugitives, and generally shooting them through the head. The General, conspicuous for his coolness, courage, and enterprise fell, also shot through the head, after he had lost his helmet in the *mêlée*. *Sauve qui peut* was the thought after that, and all went at a wild rush plunging down the hill to escape the terrible fire of the overwhelming Boers.

‘The 60th Rifles,’ as the *Times* told us, ‘fought their way back to camp very gallantly. All their officers escaped. The other regiments suffered more severely, especially when retreating down the steep hill. The Highlanders on the hill remained there to the last, throwing down stones on the Boers, and receiving them at the point of the bayonet. The guns at the

camp checked the Boer pursuit, and the firing ceased at 4.40.'

Insensible with pain, loss of blood, and a dreadful wound in the head, received from the butt-end of a Boer's rifle bestowed in utter wantonness, Douglas knew nothing of all this as he lay there, or of how the gallant Corporal Farmer, of the Army Hospital Corps, stood near him amid the hottest of the fire, holding a white flag over the wounded, and beseeching the Boers to spare them, but in vain, as they fired even at him and broke his right arm, on which he raised the banner of mercy with the left, and that, too, was broken by a shot, and he fell, but survived to be recommended worthily for the Victoria Cross by Sir Evelyn Wood. Had our troops met the Boers in the open, instead of where they did—'a handful' though they were, the story of the fatal hill of Majuba would have been a very different one, and our officers and men would have been spared the rage and grief with which, after a night of toil, a day of battle without food or refreshment, they flung themselves on the turf when they returned to camp, as the sun went down behind the summits of the Drakenberg.

CHAPTER LXI.

VIOLET CARRIED OFF.

THE aspect of the two Boers to whom Violet had, in her innocence and desperation, committed the care of herself, might have sufficiently appalled her, had she not by this time become somewhat used to the peasantry of Natal and the Transvaal. They were coarsely featured, heavily browed, deeply sun-burned, and ferocious in eye. Their rough coats and loose leather trousers were grimy and dirty, and their broad hats, well garnished with the pinion of some wild bird, gave a stage-bandit-like aspect to them, which their shot-belts full of cartridges, their rifles, knives, and revolvers completed. Cruelty

and coarse passion were in their eyes as they gazed upon the girl, who, unconscious thereof, and full only of her own sad and harassing thoughts, occupied a corner of the covered waggon. Hans Swartboy had ere this made Enoch Heemskirk aware of who the girl they had entrapped was—the love of that Englander whose presence at Damberger's farm had been the source of such disquiet, who had disfigured him, and who, he supposed, had come between himself, Enoch, and Gertrude; for Hans, as we have said, had been lurking and listening, and though he knew but little English, yet he knew enough of the silent language understood by the lovers of all countries to be pretty certain of the interest Violet and Douglas had in each other. Thus revenge and triumph glowed together in the heart of Enoch at the anticipation of all the wrong and distress he might now subject his enemy to. The twilight was deepening now, when Violet roused herself and looked at her watch.

'Surely we should have reached Fort Lucas by this time?' she said to Hans, for something in the eyes of Enoch Heemskirk made her shudder and avoid their gaze.

'Yes; had we been travelling in that direction,' was the cool response of Hans, so far as she could understand him.

'You do not mean to hint that you are *not* doing so?'

'I do not hint it at all,' he replied gruffly. 'We are going precisely the opposite way.'

'Then stop at once,' said Violet authoritatively, notwithstanding her agitation and alarm.

'Why?' asked Hans, with a chuckle.

'I must alight and make my way back as best I can. Oh, why have you deceived me?'

The Boers looked at each other and laughed aloud.

'I shall leap out and go back on foot.'

'Not a step,' said Heemskirk, thrusting her back as she rose from her seat. 'You are with us, and with us you will remain till we reach the other end of yonder kloof in the Drakenberg.'

Supposing that their purpose was to keep her a prisoner, and take her for some object of their own to the Boer headquarters,

she remained silent, though in tears for a time. Darkness set in, but Hans lighted a lantern that hung in the roof of his waggon, and Violet's soul began to die within her as she saw the glances with which these men regarded her from time to time, and when knowing how utterly she was at the mercy of both in that voiceless solitude. Simultaneously all three heard a sound, which seemed to come from a vast distance—the sound of an infantry bugle ! Instinctively she started from her seat, but was again thrust back—this time with an oath.

'A bugle,' said Hans ; 'and where a bugle sounds the Englishers are sure to be.'

'Why so sure?' asked Heemskirk.

'Because—henckers ! there may be water without frogs, but not frogs without water.'

'The accursed Englishers are surely in motion to-night.'

'To get another beating at the hands of Joubert.'

The progress of the waggon up the mountain track was so slow that it did not achieve a mile an hour, and frequently it came to a standstill when its clumsy wheels were wedged between the large stones that encumbered all the way. Never would Violet forget the protracted horror of that night, alone in the wilderness, with such men as these. Her sense of present personal danger combated for supremacy with her sorrow for the cloud that had fallen between her and Douglas ; and her terror increased as she saw Hans and Enoch imbibing that most intoxicating and inflammatory of all liquors, 'Cape smoke,' from a square case bottle, to the mouth of which each applied his own from time to time. Then Hans, grasping her wrist, in mockery offered her the bottle, and as she cowered and shuddered at his touch, a sort of savage exultation thrilled through Hans, who had no more idea of what an English lady really was than the Zulu—some of whose blood he inherited—might have had. She had some trouble in freeing her delicate wrist and hand from his hard and powerful grasp. She could not speak—she could scarcely breathe. She had read of situations such as this in romances, and seen them on the stage, but she

never could have imagined that a time would come when she—Violet Jermyn—was to be an actor in one. Suddenly Hans attempted to take her in his arms, but, endued with strength beyond what she believed she possessed, she planted her hands on his breast and held him back; but she was then seized by Enoch Heemskirk, and felt his horrible kisses and pestilent breath upon her face. A great shriek escaped her, and she saw the ugly face of the Vorelooper, or Africander boy who drove the team, looking into the waggon, and, with a grin, enjoying what he thought must be rare sport.

‘Can it be the will of Heaven,’ she thought, ‘that I am to perish here—to die thus? Oh, God have pity on me, and protect me!’

The awful loathing and horror with which she repelled the odious advances of these wretches actually quelled them both for a time, and perhaps some memory of the gentle Gertrude influenced Heemskirk just then, as he was the first to cease molesting her. But, by the time the contents of the case bottle had been completely imbibed, Hans, though to all appearance he sat smoking his huge meerschaum quietly, became again dangerous. The veins in his brow began to swell; a half-drunken and wholly revengeful fire glanced in his deep-set eyes; admiration of her beauty, exultation at her helplessness, with hatred of Douglas, were all expressed there. He drew near her again; she shrunk as far back as she could, and her soft hair was disturbed by his hot and foetid breath, as it came from his distended nostrils like the snorting of a charger. But she was saved from further molestation just then, for the waggon, which had been proceeding at a snail’s pace, came suddenly to a standstill, and the Vorelooper ceased to crack his jambok, and uttered a shout which made both Hans and Enoch spring out with their rifles cocked. One of the two oxen which drew the waggon—a vehicle which in reality belonged to Enoch Heemskirk—had fallen ill in the traces, and had to be ‘outspanned’ in the dark; and as it had sunk down, it was evident that nothing could exactly be done with it probably till daybreak, as the

night was far advanced now, and this episode occupied the attention of the precious pair for some hours of this, to Violet, terrible night—the night on which our poor soldiers, at no great distance off, were toiling up the steep rocks of Majuba ; and so, while Enoch and Hans, grumbling and swearing, busied themselves in some fashion about the ox—unharnessing, and rubbing it with tufts of grass taken from the wayside—the impish-looking Vorelooper, by their orders, kept a sharp watch upon all the movements of Violet. After a time he reported that she was asleep, but in reality the unfortunate Violet had fainted, and overcome by all she had suffered, lay insensible of all that passed around her ; but Enoch, who suspected this apparent faint might be only part of a scheme to cause vigilance to be relaxed and an escape favoured, sternly desired the Vorelooper to continue on the watch as before. Perhaps the insensibility of Violet eventually became a kind of sleep, for the day had dawned when she recovered consciousness, and found her captors in sore perplexity, as the ox had died, and with only one the waggon would never be got over such ground as that they had to traverse, so the Vorelooper was despatched in some direction, Violet knew not and cared not whither, to procure another, and ere he returned, events had transpired that his employers scarcely foresaw. The Boers had lighted a fire by the wayside and made some black coffee, of which Violet was fain to partake, so worn, faint, and feeble did she feel. They next proceeded to skin the ox, and, heedless of what might have occasioned its death, to broil some steaks as a repast, while Violet sat in the waggon, bowed down with misery, and watching, in hope of succour, the far-stretching vista that led to the kloof of the Drakenberg, which they had not passed as yet. They had outspanned the other ox, which was quietly grazing by the wayside. Groves of mimosa and camel-thorn bordered the track, forming a close bush, and the rocks that impended over the way had a gloomy and even terrific aspect ; they were all grey granite or red porphyry, and glittered in the sunshine. To the westward vast piles of flat-topped mountains rose against blue sky—the Dra-

kenberg, in most places thorny, bushy, and barren; and here and there, at vast distances, a column of smoke ascending into the close air told of the presence of a hunter, a wanderer, or it might be a lurking foe. As the morning advanced she heard—and her odious companions heard—a hoarse, low murmur in the air—a kind of booming like a distant sea among caverned rocks, dulled by the distance. Then came the assurance that it was the din of battle. The Boers in their thousands were assailing on all sides Colley's three hundred devoted men on the hill of Majuba, which they were defending as the three hundred Greeks of old defended the Thessalian pass against all the might of Xerxes. And Douglas was there, she was certain. All that long, and to her most agonizing day, the distant and monotonous rumble continued—the fire of musketry alone, without the heavy boom of cannon, as none were in the engagement.

To while away the time the Boers betook them again to a bottle or two of that perilous stuff called 'Cape Smoke,' and soon again they became more brutal and reckless as their ready passions were inflamed, and both of them began to address her in language which, luckily, she failed to understand, though there was no mistaking their actions and the expression of their eyes. On her knees in the waggon she besought them to spare her, for the sake of their mothers, of their sisters, if they had any, and for a few minutes they took their felon hands off her, and suddenly, inflamed by mutual jealousy of each other, the eyes of Enoch and Hans began to glare as they grasped their knives, and a mutual conflict seemed on the point of ensuing between them. Violet now rose and stood before those coarse, daring, and unscrupulous men, her delicate and white hands and arms crossed upon her palpitating bosom that heaved beneath them; her eyes were full of mingled horror and sorrow, for life had lost its charm now, and her pale face was like a sculptor's model of dead beauty. She hoped they would kill her, and speedily, so no prayer for mercy escaped her now. Suddenly the ruffians, when just on the point of closing with each other, started, drew back, and a hoarse Dutch oath escaped Enoch as

a sound was heard—hoofs, undoubtedly; and just as the setting sun began to stream down into the rocky pass where the waggon stood, eight of the Queen's hussars, with two officers, came at a leisurely trot, but in single file, along the path—patrolling evidently. A cry escaped Violet, but Hans sprang into the waggon beside her, drawing close the tarpaulin awning which covered it, and furiously thrusting her down to enforce silence, held his knife near her slender throat, with the deliberate threat that he would draw it across, and quickly too, if she uttered the slightest sound.

Up came the hussars, and they seemed to have considerable trouble in getting past the waggon, which almost completely blocked up the narrow way. As they paused she heard a voice in English—the voice of Captain Bramley; with what emotions she recognised it—ask Enoch if he would favour him with a light for his cigar.

Enoch accorded what he wished. Then said Bramley: 'I see a bottle lying there. Can you sell us something to drink? We are all thirsty as lime-kilns.'

'I have nothing, mynheer, but some Cape smoke.'

'Ugh! give each of the men a glass; but I would rather be excused.'

'And I too,' replied the officer, his companion.

'There has been fighting somewhere to-day,' said Enoch, as he uncorked a bottle in haste, to get rid of these unwelcome visitors; 'we have heard the firing.'

'*We*—you seem to be alone. Fighting; I believe you—some devilish hard work has been going on at a place called Majuba—an infantry affair, so we were not in it.'

'Are the Boer losses heavy?'

'How the devil should I know? Ours are, I am sorry to say,' said Bramley, tossing Enoch some coins.

'Yes—heavy indeed,' said the other officer, speaking half to himself and half to the soldiers; 'several officers of the 58th and 92nd have been brought in wounded and dying.'

'And with them that gentleman volunteer, who has excited

so much interest in camp, sir,' added a hussar; 'Douglas I think his name is.'

At that moment a sound like a gurgling or half-strangled cry came from the inside of the waggon.

'What have you here that you conceal so closely?' asked Bramley, with sudden suspicion.

The hussar who had thus casually mentioned the name of Douglas drew back the cover of the waggon, and perceived Hans kneeling upon Violet, with one hand on her throat and the other grasping a knife which was covered with blood.

'One of the Red Cross sisters!' exclaimed the hussar; 'and, by heavens, this fellow has murdered her!'

Without a moment's hesitation he passed his sword more than once through the body of Hans, while another soldier, by one tremendous stroke, clove the head of Enoch Heemskirk.

'Lift out the lady,' said Bramley.

Dismounting, the hussar tenderly and carefully lifted out Violet, who, though nearly senseless, was uninjured; for the blood that had dripped from the knife of Hans had come from the veins of the ox he had been skinning.

'Miss Jermyn—Miss Violet Jermyn, here—here as a Red Cross nurse!' exclaimed Bramley, in blank and utter astonishment; 'here in Natal, and in the hands of these Boer wretches!' he added, as he leaped from his horse. 'How, in the name of wonder—how, in the name of heaven, came this strange event to pass?'

It was long ere Violet could give some explanation that fully satisfied the bewildered Bramley, for when fully in possession of all her faculties, she had but two emotions in her heart—anxiety to ascertain the fate of Douglas—for all her pride had departed—and gratitude to heaven for sending the hussars so opportunely to her assistance—an event but for which she should too surely never have been heard of again.

CHAPTER LXII.

CONCLUSION.

'BROUGHT in wounded and dying !' The words of the hussar seemed to burn into the heart of Violet, and, faint and worn though she was on reaching Newcastle, she at once sought the hospital in sorrow, terror, and great agony of spirit.

'He is here,' was the reply of Dr. Elderflower, in answer to her inquiries, which were framed she knew not how.

'And his injuries——'

'Are severe—a leg smashed by a bullet, and a sharp contusion by a fall down the rocks of that accursed hill. Poor fellow, his presence among us is strange, as I have heard among the staff that he is a peer of Scotland, and a man of considerable wealth.'

'Is he fatally hurt ?' asked Violet, with ashy lips and a breathless voice.

'As yet it is impossible to say,' replied the doctor, thoughtfully tugging at his nether lip ; 'in a day or two we shall know.'

'May I see him?—he is a dear, dear friend.'

'Oh, indeed ! well, but in that case you must not speak to him, or excite him.'

'Oh, I shall be quiet, and—so obedient.'

On the floor, on a pallet, his head propped by a straw pillow, in his shirt and trousers—the latter ripped up above the knee of one leg, showing the bandaged splints that now secured the fractured bone—his head also bandaged, lay Douglas, Lord Torthorwald, in that miserable place, surrounded by men groaning, and, in some instances, dying with rifle-shot wounds in all parts of the body.

On every hand were seen sponges and buckets, bloody rags, bloody and torn uniforms, scarlet coats and tartan kilts, infantry tunics—to Violet's eyes a maze and phantasmagoria of horror and agony, amid which was one central figure—the man she

loved, and who loved her so well. His pride of bearing was gone now, but his manly beauty of feature remained, though its serenity had departed, for spasms of pain made his lips quiver from time to time. He was pale as Carrara marble, in hue contrasting strongly with the darkness of his hair, moustache, and eyebrows; and deeper than ever she had seen it was the knit of his eyebrows. Suffering still from the contusion of the head, he seemed insensible to all around him.

'Sholto!' exclaimed Violet involuntarily, with pallid lip, as she went down on her knees. 'Sholto,' she repeated, as she stretched out her hands towards him, with imploring and piteous gestures, while tears blinded her.

'Hereby hangs a tale,' thought the doctors; 'but it won't do to have scenes in this place.'

At the utterance of his name, or at the sound of *her* voice—it is impossible to say which—his eyes opened, the lids quivered, and then closed again, as the doctor gently but firmly led her reluctantly away.

* * * * *

Three weeks had elapsed from that time, and the patient Violet had left, removed to one of the prettiest houses in Newcastle, had lain for days staring at the light of spring as it shone through the window opposite his bed—a window through which the valley of the Icondu river was visible, the earthen works of Fort Amiel, and far away westward the flat-topped mountains of the inevitable Drakenberg. In true Dutch taste various bird-cages hung outside the window, and there too were bright scarlet flowers in pots to brighten the room, which though near Boerland was scrupulously clean, but rather remote from being luxurious. There had he lain since Doctor Elderflower, at Violet's earnest entreaty, had him conveyed hither, from the horrors of the hospital, and Bramley's own valet was in hourly attendance upon him—lain staring out at the blue sky, which became amber and yellowish green at eve, and then dark at night, when the slumber induced by great pain fell upon him; and thrice daily the kind staff-surgeon came to watch the case, to sit in the arm-chair by the bed, to feel his pulse, watch in

hand, and give directions when necessary to the soldier-servant who was in attendance, or to one who was an object of interest and curiosity to all in the camp—Violet Jermyn—still a Red Cross Sister. At last there came a day when, from amid the unconsciousness in which it was sunk, the soul of the sufferer seemed to struggle back to the world—a day when he seemed first to become aware that a soft voice was murmuring lovingly in his ear, and a hand soft as velvet was laid upon his brow. Many a time had the hard, rough hand of the worthy soldier, his other attendant, been a source of worry to him, when he knew not what the nature of the worry was; a long draught of some cooling drink was given him, as a soft arm pillowed his head; he lifted his heavy and stiffened eyelids, and a fair, earnest, and anxious face, with eyes of great sweetness, was bending over him.

‘Violet!’ he whispered, mechanically as it were, and closing his eyes sank into sleep, conceiving perhaps that what he had seen had been a dream.

So, as day followed day, the same dear eyes watched him, and the same soft hands ministered unto his little wants, yet the loving watcher never grew weary, for she gave unto him all that love and devotion can give. He might yet die, and he might yet recover, for the doctor seemed ever anxious about him. If he died, he would never know—in this world at least—the love, tenderness, and fidelity of which he had been the object; and if he recovered, the suspicion or misconception as to that love and her object—that suspicion, the fear of which had so dismayed and horrified Violet—might actually come to pass. But that idea was too painful to consider now—now that the helpless creature seemed so much, indeed all, her own, and in that remote corner of the world. Bramley had telegraphed to Barons Hall concerning the discovery and safety of Violet, and great was the bewilderment, and exceeding the joy, of all there, though the news seemed strange indeed.

‘A nursing sister—a *Sœur de Charité*!’ exclaimed Mademoiselle Ricochette. ‘Mon Dieu! Mademoiselle Violette was

always *ver particulaire* about her hair, her cuffs and collars—how about *zem* now ?

‘I knew they’d ‘ear of the poor dear in time,’ said Mrs. Jellybagg to the astounded Mr. Tapleigh ; ‘though a watched over pot never boils, I knew she’d come back again.’

But this was not the case, as the worthy housekeeper had never ceased to bewail Violet as with the dead, and had never been weary of conjuring up the most morbid and horrible surmises, after the alleged visit to Scotland became no longer tenable as an excuse for her absence. In the household the reputation of being eccentric was given to the enthusiastic girl who daily watched and waited on her lover, whose life seemed to tremble in the balance, and doctors seemed doubtful still, and some there were who never wearied of prescribing, administering, and tormenting him, till Violet was glad when they were gone, and she could sit with his thin and wasted hand in her own—sit motionless as a statue, restraining even her gentle breath, lest it should rouse him from his snatches of troubled sleep, to which dreams came now—dreams in which love and terror for herself were anxiously mingled with the carnage, the fury and uproar of defending the hill of Majuba. He dreamt much of the night march, after his futile ride to Fort Lucas on the evening he lost her ; and again and again she heard him utter her name tenderly and imploringly, while repeating that, this self-sought danger and self-imposed duty over, he would cast military honour to the winds, and devote all his energies to tracing and following Violet—to rescuing, or, if too late, avenging her ! Then would come visions of the strife, of the deaths of poor Tom Puxleigh and others, and the moment when the ball broke his thigh ; and, in falling, his first bitter thought was of his sudden helplessness and inability to succour Violet—the agony of that thought which was despair ; and then he seemed to feel himself falling down—down, till he became totally insensible. It was from such dreams that he now awoke, and became coherent in idea and sensible of what was around him ; that he was a feeble patient with Violet—Violet !—

for his nurse ! How sadly and pitifully she regarded his wasted face and unnaturally brilliant eyes, while he thought she never looked so beautiful. Her cheeks were delicately tinted like the leaf of the wild rose ; not a spot marred the exquisite purity of her complexion, in the beautifully rounded cheek, the slender neck, and tiny ears. Her eyes of violet blue, fringed with their dark lashes, were, as of old, gifted with a sidelong and down-cast glance that proved very perilous to all male eyes that met it.

‘I fear the doctor has not yet pronounced me out of danger, pet Violet,’ said he one day, ‘and—and oh ! my love, I feel weak as a child—I, who was such a great hulking fellow once. If I die,’ he added, after a pause, ‘as die I may, have me sent home, Violet ; and bury me, not here—where the springbok may graze and the baboon bark over my grave—but at home, in the old churchyard of the monks of Faile at Torthorwald.’

‘Oh ! Sholto, do not speak thus !’ Violet would wail in reply, and for a moment they looked at each other as those only do who love passionately and have suffered deeply in their love.

Now she thought Douglas would not think her unmaidenly, unwomanly in having followed him to this distant land. Her heart, which had once withered up at that fear, now felt it no more ; and as she watched him, she prayed for him with a fervour never known when praying for her innocent self. She felt that she might lose him after all ; and it is only when we seem about to part with one beloved by us, that we learn to know how inexpressibly near they are. But he grew stronger day by day.

‘Oh ! Violet,’ said he once, ‘we seem to have been the mere playthings of some demon—some evil imp—that delights in mischief, sorrow, and blunders ! And that I was Lord Torthorwald—who was pitiless enough to tell you so ?’

Then she told how that knowledge came to pass, and recapitulated her fears and her sense of mortification.

‘Violet, I always knew that I was, of course, Lord Tor-

thorwald and Carlyle. Yet, even with that knowledge, when I sunk my rank I spurned the thought of being deemed a fortune-hunter.'

'You know now, darling, that I never dreamed of your being Lord Torthorwald till—till that letter came—and the day I left you.'

Then, after a few mutual explanations concerning their parting, her letter and her flight, with her subsequent perils, were referred to no more. Douglas soon became convalescent. Fighting was over in the Transvaal now; the eight days' truce with the Boers had become a thing of the past; and proposals for a peace were on the *tapis*, though crime and outrage were still rife on the western slopes of the Drakenberg.

* * * * *

Our tale is told, or nearly so. Violet, with the Lady Superior and many other lady nurses, set out on their homeward way to Pietermaritzburg, whither Douglas followed her, with other convalescents, in care of the Army Hospital Corps. When he joined her, she handed him a *Times*, which, under fashionable intelligence a few weeks old, contained one notice which excited mutually their surprise and sense of amusement—the marriage of Kate to Sir Harry Honeywood, by the Reverend Octave Paschal Bede, M.A., at Barons Hall, assisted by another reverend M.A., and among the names of those present were Lady Basset, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Sheldon, Mr. John Charters, and Mr. Cospatrick Douglas, the private secretary of Sir Jahleel.

'Cospatrick, the luckless, your papa's trusted adherent, *vice* Douglas dismissed the service! How has this come to pass, Violet? Honeywood is tied hard and fast,' added Torthorwald, with a laugh and a fond smile. 'I have no more to fear from him, at all events.'

A silent kiss was the only response of Violet.

'We, too, will have our little surprise for them,' said he, as he drew her close to his breast; and within a few days after the

bells of every church in Pietermaritzburg rang a merry peal when Lord and Lady Torthorwald were united by the Bishop of Natal, whose daughters were the bridesmaids, while Bramley acted as groomsmen. A week later, and a happy couple were standing together on the poop of the homeward-bound *Upnor Castle*, which was gaily decorated with much bunting in their honour, as she stood out of Durban harbour, heaving as she crossed the bar; while a lovely sunset reddened sea and land; and long they stood close together, watching, but certainly without regret, the beautiful hills of La Tierra de Natal, as they began to sink into the evening sea, and the swift ship sped on the highroad home to Old England.

THE END.

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